JOE BENITEZ'S
Vol. 2
Chen · Benitez · Montiel · Garcia · Heisler
Lady Mechanika™

THE COMPLETE
VOLUME TWO
SECOND VOLUME

LADY MECHANIKA™
VOLUME 2: THE TABLET OF DESTINIES

COLOR ASSISTS BY:
PETER PANTAZIS *(Chapter 4)*
SABINE RICH *(Chapter 6)*

COVER GALLERY ART BY:
JOE BENITEZ & PETER STEIGERWALD
(except where noted otherwise)

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY:
JOE BENITEZ & MIKE GARCIA

VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO:
PETER STEIGERWALD

ART DIRECTOR & STORY EDITOR:
JOE BENITEZ

SUPERVISING EDITOR:
MARCIA CHEN

PRODUCTION:
MICHAEL HEISLER, MARCIA CHEN

BOOK DESIGN:
MARK ROSLAN, PETER STEIGERWALD

LADY MECHANIKA LOGO BY:
PETER STEIGERWALD

Originally published in single magazine form as
LADY MECHANIKA: THE TABLET OF DESTINIES #1-6
by Benitez Productions.

LADY MECHANIKA™, its logos, all characters and the distinctive likenesses thereof, and all related elements are trademarks of Joe Benitez, unless otherwise noted. Image Comics logo designed by Rob Liefeld. "Image" and the Image Comics logos are registered trademarks of Image Comics, Inc. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means (except for short excerpts for journalistic or review purposes), without the express written permission of Joe Benitez or Image Comics, Inc. All names, characters, events, and locales in this publication are entirely fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons (living or dead), events, or places, without satirical intent, is coincidental. Digital Edition. For international rights, contact: foreignlicensing@imagecomics.com.

Copyright © 2016 Joe Benitez.
All Rights Reserved.

Published by Image Comics, Inc.,
P.O. Box 14457, Portland, OR 97293

FIRST PRINTING, October 2025
ISBN: 978-1-5343-3346-8

Story by M.M. CHEN

Colors by MIKE GARCIA

Pencils by JOE BENITEZ and MARTIN MONTIEL

Letters by MICHAEL HEISLER

JOE BENITEZ'S

Lady Mechanika

in

The TABLET of DESTINIES

LADY MECHANIKA CREATED BY JOE BENITEZ

Chapter One

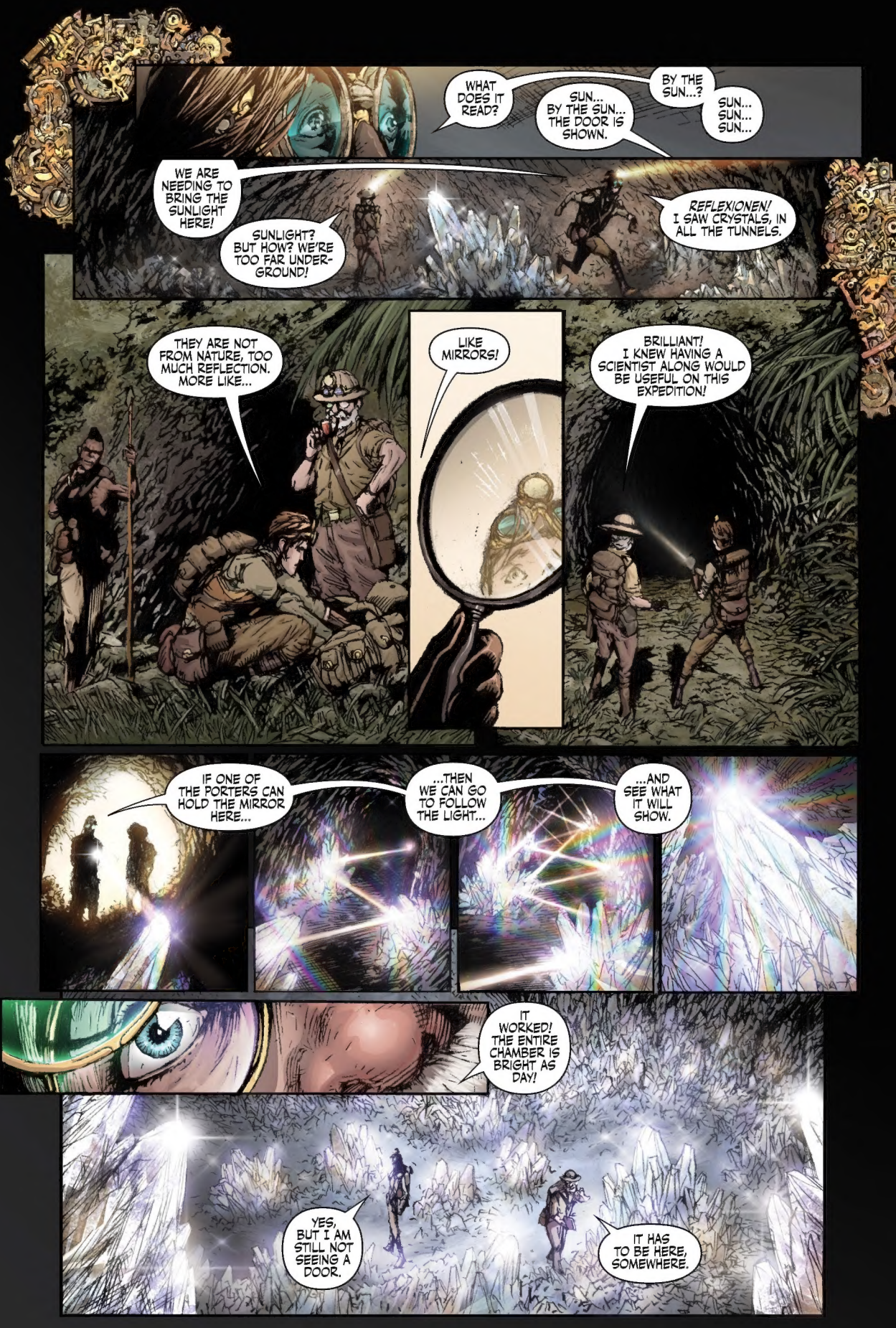
"The Tablet of Destinies holds the knowledge of the Gods and the secrets of the Universe... he who possesses [it] shall rule the world."

-Ancient Sumerian Legend

PROLOGUE. SOMEWHERE IN THE HEART OF AFRICA, THE DARK CONTINENT.
PROFESSOR THOMSEN? DID YOU FINISH YOUR LETTER? I AM TO SEND MY REPORT NOW.
ONE... MOMENT...AND THERE! HERE YOU GO.

DO YOU NOT FIND ALL THIS REPORTING TIRESOME, MR. STRASSMANN? NOT THAT I'M UNGRATEFUL.
CLK
IT IS NO BOTHER.
THEY REQUIRE THE REPORTS ONLY ONCE A WEEK.
CLK CLK CLK
AND THEY HAVE DONE VERY MUCH FOR ME.
YES, WELL, I TOO AM VERY THANKFUL FOR YOUR UNIVERSITY AND THEIR AMAZING CLOCKWORK BIRDS.
THEY'VE AFFORDED ME THESE OPPORTUNITIES TO WRITE TO MY GRANDDAUGHTER, EVEN WHILE WE'RE OUT HERE IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE.
COME NOW, MR. STRASSMANN, THIS IS IT!
TIME TO START THE FINAL CHAPTER OF THIS GRAND ADVENTURE!
YOU MAY FINALLY HAVE SOMETHING OF SUBSTANCE TO REPORT TO YOUR ADVISORS!

THE REPORTS ARE ONLY FOR THE REQUIRED PROCEDURES. THE *POLYTECHNISCHE SCHULE* HAS NO INTEREST WITH ARCHAEOLOGY EXPEDITIONS.
I AM SURPRISED THAT THEY ALLOWED FOR ME TO COME. THEY DO NOT USUALLY PERMIT SO LONG A PAUSE FROM OUR STUDIES. NOT FOR THE STUDENTS WITH SCHOLARSHIPS.
THANK YOU AGAIN, PROFESSOR, FOR WRITING TO MY SUPERIORS. I BELIEVE YOUR LETTER, AND MY REPORT ABOUT YOUR RESEARCH, CONVINCED THEM TO GIVE PERMISSION.
YOU ARE VERY WELCOME, MR. STRASSMANN! I AM GLAD TO HAVE YOU ALONG.
NOT EVERY EXPEDITION CAN BOAST THE SERVICES OF A CHEMIST, STUDENT OR OTHERWISE!
MANY MINUTES LATER...
IS THIS THE END? I SEE NO MORE TUNNELS.
THE TEXT DESCRIBED SOME SORT OF DOOR BUILT INTO THE WALL, BUT I DO NOT SEE ANY--
PROFESSOR! LOOK!
THERE IS WRITING HERE! IT LOOKS TO BE THE SAME LANGUAGE AS THE BOOK?
THE CHARACTERS ARE SIMILAR, YES. BUT THE TEXT WAS WRITTEN IN AKKADIAN, THE COMMON TONGUE OF ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA.
THIS, THIS IS EVEN OLDER. SUMERIAN, WE CALL IT.


WHAT DOES IT READ?
SUN... BY THE SUN... THE DOOR IS SHOWN.
BY THE SUN...?
SUN... SUN... SUN...
WE ARE NEEDING TO BRING THE SUNLIGHT HERE!
SUNLIGHT? BUT HOW? WE'RE TOO FAR UNDER-GROUND!
REFLEXIONEN! I SAW CRYSTALS, IN ALL THE TUNNELS.
THEY ARE NOT FROM NATURE, TOO MUCH REFLECTION. MORE LIKE...
LIKE MIRRORS!
BRILLIANT! I KNEW HAVING A SCIENTIST ALONG WOULD BE USEFUL ON THIS EXPEDITION!
IF ONE OF THE PORTERS CAN HOLD THE MIRROR HERE...
...THEN WE CAN GO TO FOLLOW THE LIGHT...
...AND SEE WHAT IT WILL SHOW.
IT WORKED! THE ENTIRE CHAMBER IS BRIGHT AS DAY!
YES, BUT I AM STILL NOT SEEING A DOOR.
IT HAS TO BE HERE, SOMEWHERE.

THE SUN IS GOING DOWN.
I'M SORRY, PROFESSOR. IT DID NOT WORK.
WE'LL TRY AGAIN TOMORROW. AND I'LL GO THROUGH THE TEXT AGAIN. THERE MUST BE --
PROFESSOR...
IT IS SOME KIND OF... *PHOSPHORESZENZ*. SEEABLE NOW BECAUSE OF THE SUNLIGHT!
KLUNK
GCH GCH GCH GCH
IT *IS* HERE...
THE LOST CITY OF ENKI...

THE SWISS ALPS.
SIR RUSSELL WILL BE POSITIVELY DYING OF ENVY WHEN HE HEARS WE'VE HUNTED WITH THE INFAMOUS MECHANICAL HUNTRESS HERSELF, THE LADY MECHANIKA!
UNDOUBTEDLY. HE --
VIOLA! COME QUICKLY! I SEE IT! I SEE IT!
OH BOLLOCKS.

STAND ASIDE, SEBASTIAN. I'LL GET HIM.
WHOOSH
THUNK
RRRRRRGH
NICE SHOT, SISTER.
UH-OH...
BATHUMP
BATHUMP
BATHUMP

GGRRAAAAH
HYAH!
EEEEEEK!
AAAAAHH!!
FWUMP
RRAAAARRRRH!!
RUN, YOU FOOLS!
I WILL NOT BE ABLE TO HOLD THIS BEAST OFF FOR LONG!

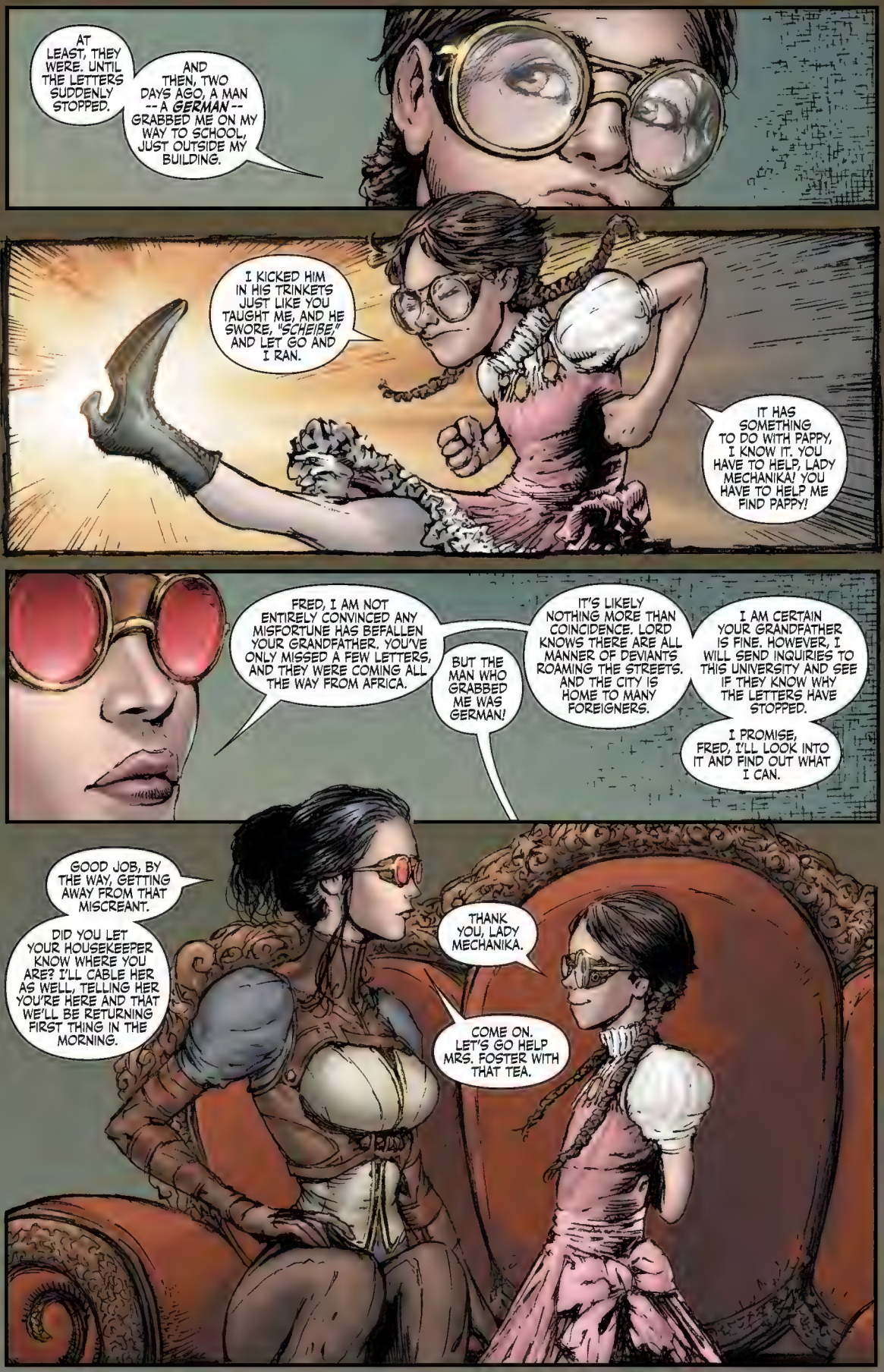
UNGH!
SMAK
GRRAHH!
KRUNCH
GLRRR!
OOOMPH!
THUNK
RRRRRRRH!
BANG!
SORRY, OLD CHAP, BUT YOU LEFT ME NO OTHER OPTION.
HUNH HUNH HUNH
LADY MECHANIKA! HOLD!
DO NOT KILL THE CREATURE!
WE CAN'T LET YOU HAVE ALL THE FUN NOW, CAN WE?
SNK!

SEBASTIAN! NOW LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE! YOU GOT BLOOD ALL OVER MY OUTFIT! THIS IS NEVER GOING TO COME OUT.
OH PLEASE, VIOLA! TELL ME WHEN YOU WERE EVER GOING TO WEAR THAT OUTFIT AGAIN.
CONSIDER IT A MEMENTO OF OUR FIRST HUNT WITH THE LADY MECHANIKA.
THERE IS THAT, I SUPPOSE.
A MARVELOUS CHASE, LADY MECHANIKA! I HOPE YOU'LL ACCEPT AN OFFER TO HUNT AGAIN AT A LATER DATE.
MRRROW MRROWWW
LOOK! THERE'S MORE!
BUGGER.
HURRY! GIVE ME THE BOW!
MRROW
AW, I WANT ONE! IT WOULD LOOK ABSOLUTELY ADORABLE ON TOP OF MY ARMOIRE!
YOUR LORDSHIP, WOULD YOU PLEASE PUT DOWN YOUR WEAPON?
WE HAVE DONE ENOUGH DAMAGE HERE TODAY. THESE CUBS POSE NO THREAT TO ANYONE.
DON'T BE SILLY! I'VE GOT ONE IN MY SIGHT! LOOK, THEY AREN'T EVEN MOVING!
CLICK
I INSIST.

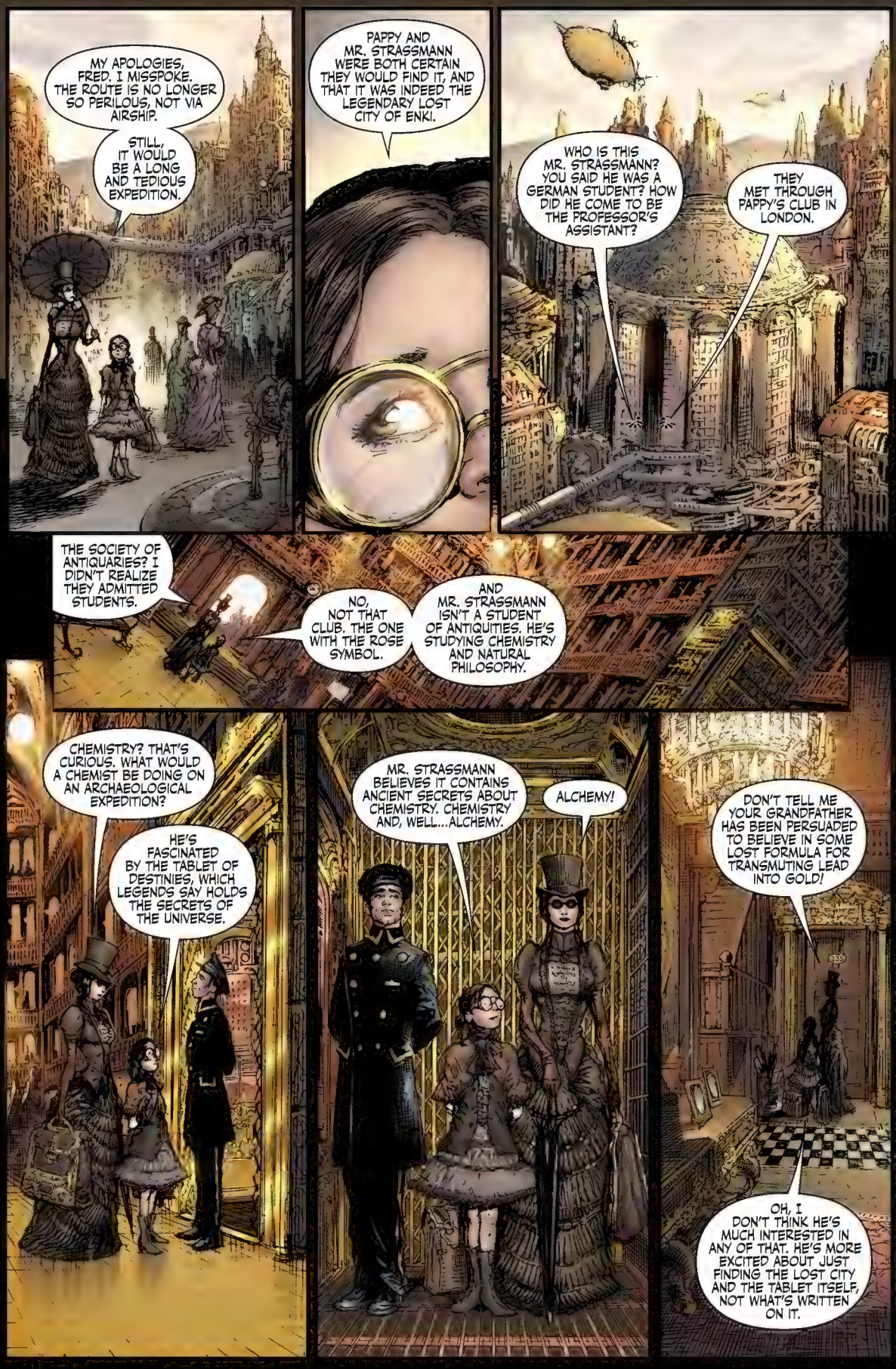
OH...VERY WELL.
THANK YOU.
BANG!
NOT ENOUGH SPORT IN IT ANYWAY. WE HAVEN'T HUNTED ANYTHING SO SIMPLE SINCE WE WERE TODDLERS!
IT *WOULD* HAVE BEEN CUTE THOUGH. STUFFED.
COME NOW! WE MUST TAKE A PHOTOGRAPH OF ALL OF US WITH THE TROPHY. YOU THERE, SET UP THE CAMERA.
MY APOLOGIES, LORD DELAMERE, BUT I AM NOT ONE FOR PHOTOGRAPHS.
OH, DON'T BE SHY. WE'LL ADD A BONUS ON TOP OF YOUR FEE.
I'M AFRAID THE ANSWER IS STILL NO.
OOH! THE FUR IS SO SOFT! MAYBE WE SHOULD MAKE A RUG OUT OF IT?
TOE-RAGS.

LONDON, ENGLAND. TWO WEEKS LATER.
LADY MECHANIKA!
YOU'VE FINALLY ARRIVED!
GOOD EVENING, MRS. FOSTER. MIGHT YOU STILL HAVE A ROOM FOR ME? I REALIZE I'M A FEW DAYS LATER THAN EXPECTED. I DO APOLOGIZE FOR ANY INCONVENIENCE.
MY PATRONS PROVED TO BE RATHER... DIFFICULT. I MAY HAVE TO CONSIDER A DIFFERENT LINE OF EMPLOYMENT IF THIS CONTINUES.
OH, I'M SORRY TO HEAR THAT. AND YES, OF COURSE, YOUR ROOM IS PREPARED AND READY FOR YOU.
THANK YOU, MRS. FOSTER. I'LL ONLY BE STAYING FOR A COUPLE DAYS, JUST LONG ENOUGH TO MEET WITH MY AGENT AND SETTLE MY AFFAIRS.
VERY WELL, BUT THERE'S ANOTHER MATTER WHICH REQUIRES YOUR IMMEDIATE ATTENTION.
A YOUNG LADY ARRIVED TWO DAYS AGO, ASKING FOR YOU. SHE SEEMED IN SOME DISTRESS SO I SAID SHE COULD STAY AND WAIT FOR YOUR RETURN.
YOUNG LADY? BUT WHO --
LADY MECHANIKA?
WINIFRED!

=OOOMPH=
OH! I AM HAPPY TO SEE YOU AS WELL, FRED, BUT WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? IS MISTER LEWIS WITH YOU?
NO, I CAME ALONE. UNCLE ARCHIE IS AWAY AT A CONVENTION. HE TOLD ME TO FIND YOU IF THERE'S EVER ANY TROUBLE.
TROUBLE? WHAT'S HAPPENED? HOW DID YOU GET HERE? AND HOW DID YOU KNOW WHERE TO FIND ME?
YOU SAID YOU ALWAYS GET A ROOM AT MRS. FOSTER'S WHENEVER YOU'RE IN LONDON.
I DID? WHEN DID I TELL YOU THAT?
YOU TOLD UNCLE ARCHIE. LAST JULY. HE WAS COMING HERE FOR A CONVENTION AND NEEDED A PLACE TO STAY.
GOOD MEMORY. AND YOUR UNCLE ATTENDS FAR TOO MANY CONVENTIONS.
NOW TELL ME WHAT HAS OCCURRED THAT CAUSED YOU TO TRAVEL THIS FAR ON YOUR OWN.
I THINK PAPPY'S IN TROUBLE. AND SOMEONE TRIED TO KIDNAP ME!
GRACIOUS!
WHY DON'T YOU TWO GO SIT IN THE PARLOR AND I'LL BRING UP SOME TEA.
START FROM THE BEGINNING. TELL ME EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED.
PAPPY WENT ON AN EXPEDITION ABOUT TWO MONTHS AGO. TO AFRICA.
HE SAID HE'D WRITE TO ME EVERY WEEK, AND HE DID, IN THE BEGINNING, BUT I HAVEN'T RECEIVED ANY LETTERS IN ALMOST A MONTH!
IF HE'S IN THE AFRICAN INTERIOR, HE LIKELY DOESN'T HAVE ACCESS TO A POSTAL SERVICE.
HE DOESN'T NEED ONE. HIS ASSISTANT USES MECHANICAL BIRDS TO SEND MESSAGES TO HIS UNIVERSITY IN GERMANY. THEY'VE BEEN FORWARDING PAPPY'S LETTERS TO ME.


AT LEAST, THEY WERE. UNTIL THE LETTERS SUDDENLY STOPPED.
AND THEN, TWO DAYS AGO, A MAN -- A GERMAN -- GRABBED ME ON MY WAY TO SCHOOL, JUST OUTSIDE MY BUILDING.
I KICKED HIM IN HIS TRINKETS JUST LIKE YOU TAUGHT ME, AND HE SWORE, "SCHEIBE," AND LET GO AND I RAN.
IT HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH PAPPY, I KNOW IT. YOU HAVE TO HELP, LADY MECHANIKA! YOU HAVE TO HELP ME FIND PAPPY!
FRED, I AM NOT ENTIRELY CONVINCED ANY MISFORTUNE HAS BEFALLEN YOUR GRANDFATHER. YOU'VE ONLY MISSED A FEW LETTERS, AND THEY WERE COMING ALL THE WAY FROM AFRICA.
BUT THE MAN WHO GRABBED ME WAS GERMAN!
IT'S LIKELY NOTHING MORE THAN COINCIDENCE. LORD KNOWS THERE ARE ALL MANNER OF DEVIANTS ROAMING THE STREETS. AND THE CITY IS HOME TO MANY FOREIGNERS.
I AM CERTAIN YOUR GRANDFATHER IS FINE. HOWEVER, I WILL SEND INQUIRIES TO THIS UNIVERSITY AND SEE IF THEY KNOW WHY THE LETTERS HAVE STOPPED.
I PROMISE, FRED, I'LL LOOK INTO IT AND FIND OUT WHAT I CAN.
GOOD JOB, BY THE WAY, GETTING AWAY FROM THAT MISCREANT.
DID YOU LET YOUR HOUSEKEEPER KNOW WHERE YOU ARE? I'LL CABLE HER AS WELL, TELLING HER YOU'RE HERE AND THAT WE'LL BE RETURNING FIRST THING IN THE MORNING.
THANK YOU, LADY MECHANIKA.
COME ON. LET'S GO HELP MRS. FOSTER WITH THAT TEA.

MECHANIKA CITY, THE CITY OF TOMORROW.
WHAT IS YOUR GRANDFATHER DOING IN AFRICA, WINIFRED? HIS SPECIALTY IS ASSYRIOLOGY, IS IT NOT? THE STUDY OF ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA?
HE'S SEARCHING FOR THE LOST CITY OF ENKI.
YOUR GRANDFATHER JOURNEYED ALL THE WAY TO AFRICA IN SEARCH OF A MYTHOLOGICAL CITY OF THE GODS?
ACCORDING TO SEVERAL MYTHS, ENKI, GOD OF WISDOM AND MAGIC, BUILT AN UNDERGROUND FORTRESS IN AFRICA WHERE HE HID HIS MAGICAL WEAPONS AND ARTIFACTS, INCLUDING THE FABLED TABLET OF DESTINIES.
IT WOULD BE AN INCREDIBLE DISCOVERY IF THEY FIND IT.
SOUNDS A BIT FANCIFUL FOR PROFESSOR THOMSEN, AKIN TO SEARCHING FOR SHANGRI-LA, OR MOUNT OLYMPUS.
HE FOUND AN ARTIFACT -- ACTUALLY, IT WAS MR. BANERJI AT THE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM WHO FOUND IT, AND GAVE IT TO PAPPY TO TRANSLATE BECAUSE IT WAS WRITTEN IN AKKADIAN.
THE TEXT DESCRIBED AN APPRENTICE SMITH'S JOURNEY FROM NINEVEH TO AN UNDERGROUND CITY LOCATED BENEATH A MOUNTAIN IN AFRICA.
AND THAT WAS SUFFICIENT TO WARRANT A DANGEROUS JOURNEY INTO THE DARK CONTINENT?

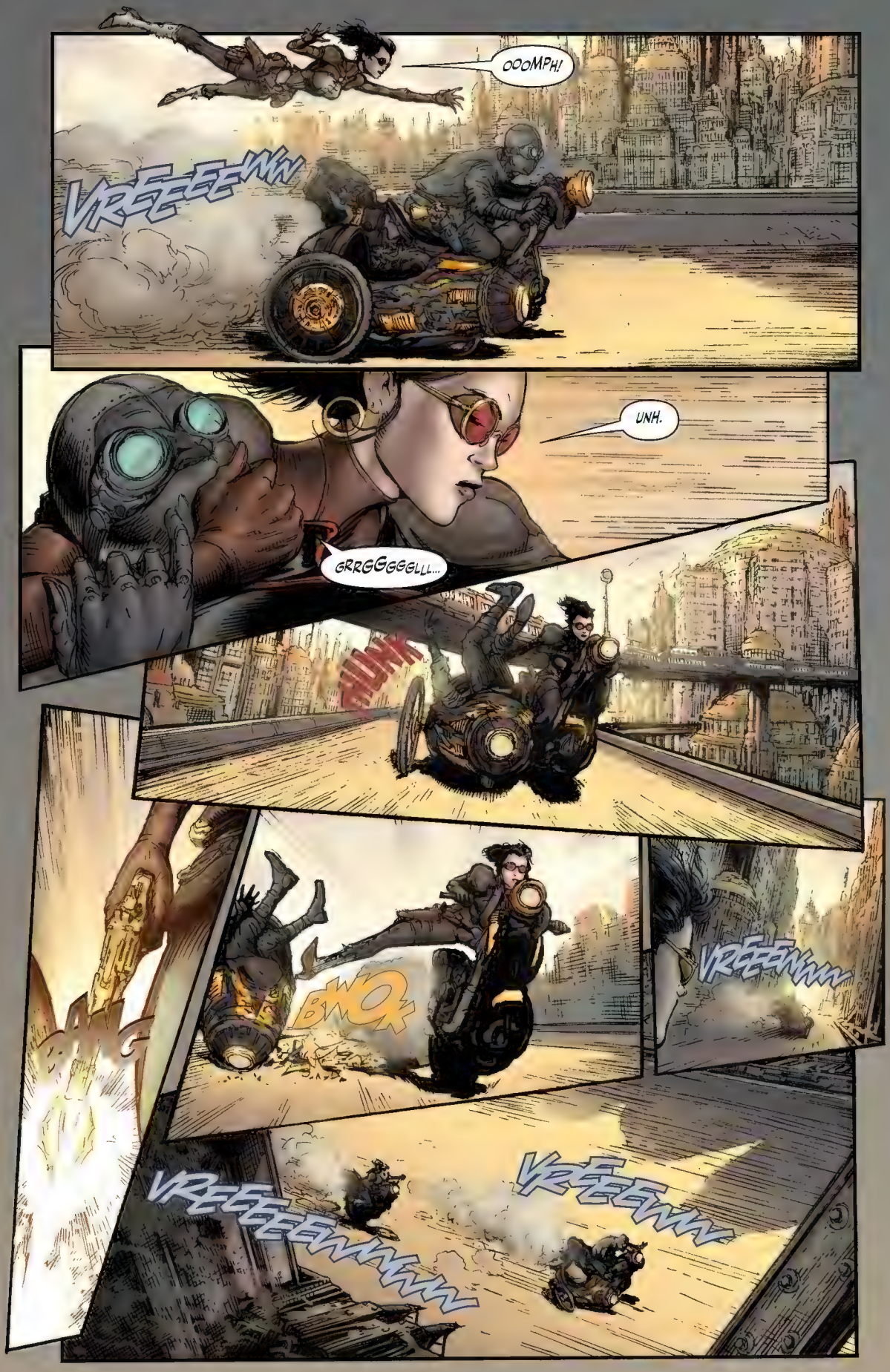

MY APOLOGIES, FRED. I MISSPOKE. THE ROUTE IS NO LONGER SO PERILOUS, NOT VIA AIRSHIP.
STILL, IT WOULD BE A LONG AND TEDIOUS EXPEDITION.
PAPPY AND MR. STRASSMANN WERE BOTH CERTAIN THEY WOULD FIND IT, AND THAT IT WAS INDEED THE LEGENDARY LOST CITY OF ENKI.
WHO IS THIS MR. STRASSMANN? YOU SAID HE WAS A GERMAN STUDENT? HOW DID HE COME TO BE THE PROFESSOR'S ASSISTANT?
THEY MET THROUGH PAPPY'S CLUB IN LONDON.
THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES? I DIDN'T REALIZE THEY ADMITTED STUDENTS.
NO, NOT THAT CLUB. THE ONE WITH THE ROSE SYMBOL.
AND MR. STRASSMANN ISN'T A STUDENT OF ANTIQUITIES. HE'S STUDYING CHEMISTRY AND NATURAL PHILOSOPHY.
CHEMISTRY? THAT'S CURIOUS. WHAT WOULD A CHEMIST BE DOING ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION?
HE'S FASCINATED BY THE TABLET OF DESTINIES, WHICH LEGENDS SAY HOLDS THE SECRETS OF THE UNIVERSE.
MR. STRASSMANN BELIEVES IT CONTAINS ANCIENT SECRETS ABOUT CHEMISTRY. CHEMISTRY AND, WELL...ALCHEMY.
ALCHEMY!
DON'T TELL ME YOUR GRANDFATHER HAS BEEN PERSUADED TO BELIEVE IN SOME LOST FORMULA FOR TRANSMUTING LEAD INTO GOLD!
OH, I DON'T THINK HE'S MUCH INTERESTED IN ANY OF THAT. HE'S MORE EXCITED ABOUT JUST FINDING THE LOST CITY AND THE TABLET ITSELF, NOT WHAT'S WRITTEN ON IT.

MRS. WILLIAMS! I'M HOME!
LADY MECHANIKA IS WITH ME. DID YOU GET HER TELEGRAM?
MRS. WILLIAMS?
AAAAAHHHH!!!!
COME HERE, WINIFRED. STAY IN THE PARLOR.
I'LL CHECK ON MRS. WILLIAMS.
BODY'S AT ABOUT ROOM TEMPERATURE. RIGOR MORTIS HAS SET IN AROUND THE FACE, BUT THE BODY IS NOT YET COMPLETELY STIFF.
SHE WAS LIKELY KILLED ONLY TWO TO FOUR HOURS AGO.
NO SIGNS OF STRUGGLE, THE FRONT ENTRANCE WAS PROPERLY LOCKED. PRESUMABLY NO REPORTS OF ANYONE HEARING ANY DISTURBANCE.
NO MURDER WEAPON IN SIGHT.

IT LOOKS AS THOUGH THEY DIDN'T EVEN SEARCH THE PLACE.
NOTES AND VALUABLES ARE UNTOUCHED. SO WHAT WERE THEY AFTER?
FRED, DID THE PROFESSOR KEEP ANYTHING HERE RELATED TO THE AFRICA EXPEDITION?
PERHAPS A COPY OF THE TEXT OR SOME SUCH THING?
FRED?
FRED!
SWISH
SWISH
RASCH! RASCH! SCHNELL WEG!

UNG!
BANG
BANG
BANG
PING
PING
PING

BOLLOCKS! TOO MANY PEDESTRIANS IN THE WAY!
VREEEEWWW
BANG
UNGH!
THWAK
VRRWW VRRWW


OOOMPH!
VREEEEWW
UNH.
GRRGGGGGLLL...
THUNK
BAM
VREEEWW
VREEEEWWWWW
VREEEWW

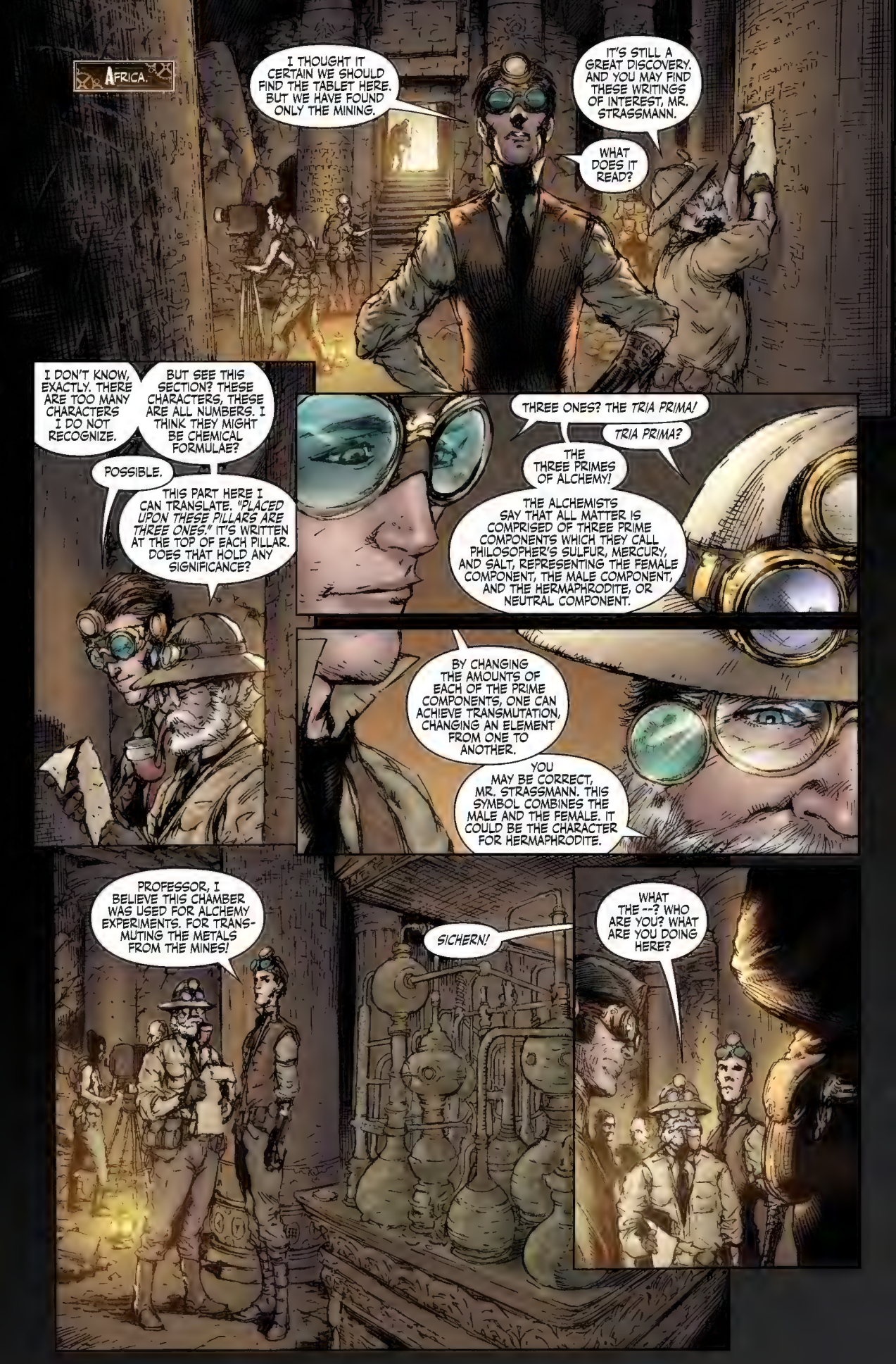
NOW I'VE GOT YOU.
VROOOWWWMM
KAPOW
WHOA!
WHOOMP
AAAHH!
UNGH... BLOODY HELL!
VZEEEEEEWWWW
FSSS
FSSS

FRED.

Chapter Two

"Alchemy is the perfect knowledge of whole Nature and Art."

-Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont,
One Hundred Fifty Three Chymical Aphohorisms


AFRICA.
I THOUGHT IT CERTAIN WE SHOULD FIND THE TABLET HERE. BUT WE HAVE FOUND ONLY THE MINING.
IT'S STILL A GREAT DISCOVERY. AND YOU MAY FIND THESE WRITINGS OF INTEREST, MR. STRASSMANN.
WHAT DOES IT READ?
I DON'T KNOW, EXACTLY. THERE ARE TOO MANY CHARACTERS I DO NOT RECOGNIZE.
BUT SEE THIS SECTION? THESE CHARACTERS, THESE ARE ALL NUMBERS. I THINK THEY MIGHT BE CHEMICAL FORMULAE?
POSSIBLE.
THIS PART HERE I CAN TRANSLATE. "PLACED UPON THESE PILLARS ARE THREE ONES." IT'S WRITTEN AT THE TOP OF EACH PILLAR. DOES THAT HOLD ANY SIGNIFICANCE?
THREE ONES? THE TRIA PRIMA!
TRIA PRIMA?
THE THREE PRIMES OF ALCHEMY!
THE ALCHEMISTS SAY THAT ALL MATTER IS COMPRISED OF THREE PRIME COMPONENTS WHICH THEY CALL PHILOSOPHER'S SULFUR, MERCURY, AND SALT, REPRESENTING THE FEMALE COMPONENT, THE MALE COMPONENT, AND THE HERMAPHRODITE, OR NEUTRAL COMPONENT.
BY CHANGING THE AMOUNTS OF EACH OF THE PRIME COMPONENTS, ONE CAN ACHIEVE TRANSMUTATION, CHANGING AN ELEMENT FROM ONE TO ANOTHER.
YOU MAY BE CORRECT, MR. STRASSMANN. THIS SYMBOL COMBINES THE MALE AND THE FEMALE. IT COULD BE THE CHARACTER FOR HERMAPHRODITE.
PROFESSOR, I BELIEVE THIS CHAMBER WAS USED FOR ALCHEMY EXPERIMENTS. FOR TRANSMUTING THE METALS FROM THE MINES!
SICHERN!
WHAT THE --? WHO ARE YOU? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

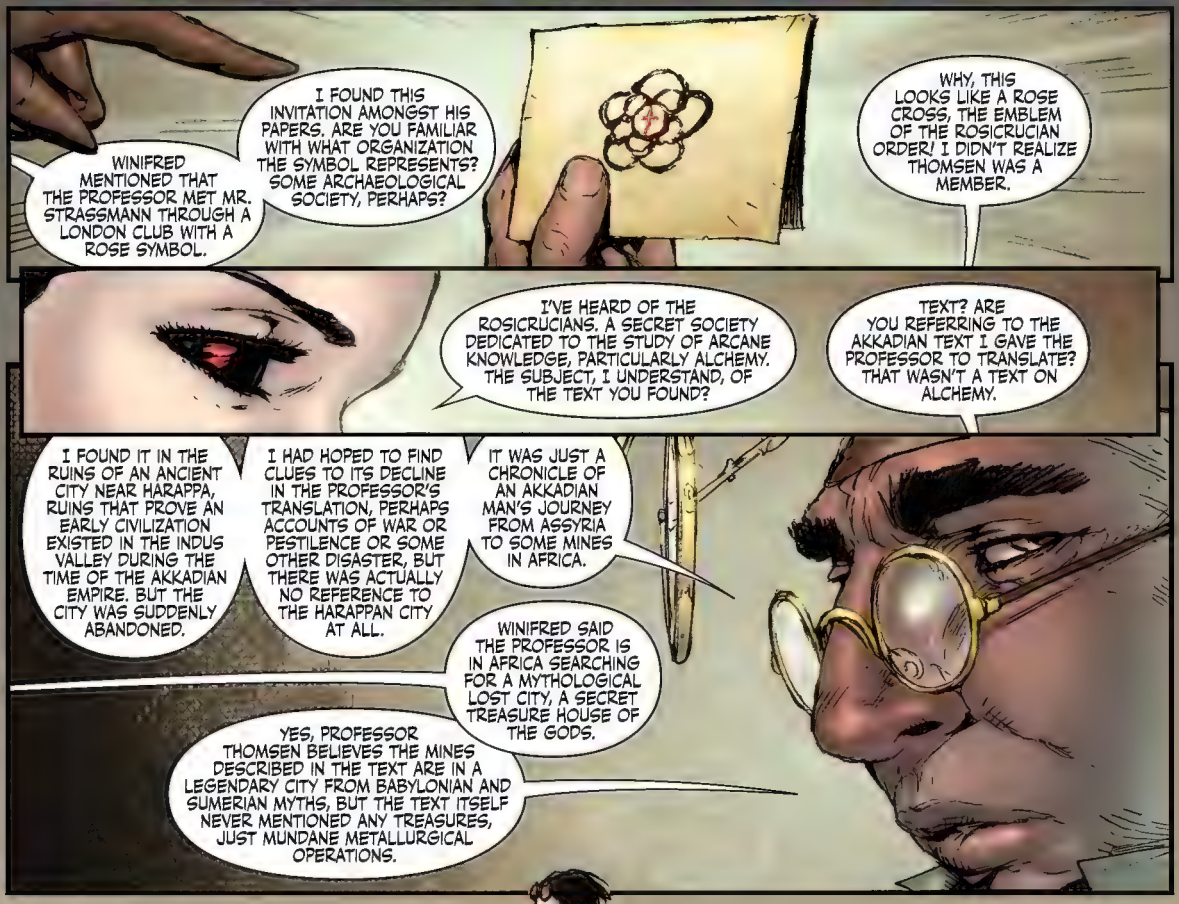
PROFESSOR THOMSEN, I PRESUME?
I AM DIREKTOR FLEISCH FROM THE POLYTECHNISCHE SCHULE PADERBORN, DEPARTMENT OF ADVANCED NATURAL SCIENCES.
I AM TAKING COMMAND OF THIS EXPEDITION.
WHAT?

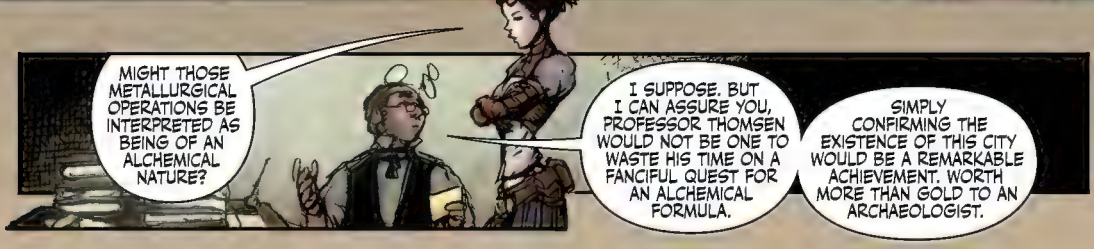
NO, NO, NO. I DON'T THINK SO. THIS IS *MY* EXPEDITION, BASED ON *MY* RESEARCH. YOU CAN'T JUST COME IN HERE AND--
PEACE, PROFESSOR! YOU WILL MAINTAIN FULL CREDIT FOR YOUR FINDINGS. WE ARE HERE TO ONLY OBSERVE AND SUPERVISE.
THAT IS ABSOLUTELY UNACCEPTABLE. I WILL NOT--
SIGH I FEARED YOU WOULD MAKE THIS DIFFICULT. PLEASE RECONSIDER, PROFESSOR. WE WOULD GREATLY APPRECIATE YOUR COOPERATION.
PERHAPS WE CAN OFFER AN INCENTIVE.
I TAKE GREAT OFFENSE TO YOUR SUGGESTION, SIR! WE ARE HERE FOR SCIENTIFIC EXPLORATION, NOT FINANCIAL GAIN!
YOU MISUNDERSTAND, *HERR* THOMSEN. I WAS NOT OFFERING A MONETARY INCENTIVE.
YOU WERE NOT? BUT--
NO. I WAS MERELY SUGGESTING YOU MIGHT CONSIDER GIVING US YOUR FULL COOPERATION IN EXCHANGE FOR...
...THE CONTINUED WELL-BEING OF YOUR GRANDDAUGHTER?

University Museum, Mechanika City.
Mr. Banerji?
Knock Knock
No consultations without an appointment. Please see the desk downstairs.
My apologies for disturbing your work, Mr. Banerji. I am--
Kindly show yourself out. I am occupied in very important research at the moment and simply cannot spare any time for idle chitchat.
Sir, I am in urgent need of your assistance. My name is Lady Mechanika, I'm a friend of Professor Henry Thomsen. His --
Wrong department. This is Ancient Asiatic Antiquities. You want Ancient Mesopotamian Studies, in the University proper.
Now, if you will please excuse me, I am extremely --
Does this look familiar?
SLAM

WHAT IS THIS?
PROFESSOR THOMSEN'S GRANDDAUGHTER WAS ABDUCTED THIS MORNING, HIS HOUSEKEEPER MURDERED.
WHAT?! MURDERED? AND MISS WINIFRED ABDUCTED? WHY WOULD ANYONE STEAL MISS WINIFRED?
I DON'T KNOW, BUT I INTEND TO FIND THE CULPRITS AND RETRIEVE HER. CAN I COUNT ON YOUR AID?
OF... OF COURSE! BUT WHAT CAN I DO?

ARE YOU ACQUAINTED WITH THE PROFESSOR'S GERMAN ASSISTANT, MR. STRASSMANN?
THE YOUNG MAN WHO WENT WITH HIM TO AFRICA? IS HE INVOLVED IN THESE MISDEEDS?
THE MEN WHO TOOK WINIFRED SPOKE GERMAN. I DO NOT KNOW IF MR. STRASSMANN IS IN LEAGUE WITH THEM, BUT IT'S THE ONLY CONNECTION OF WHICH I AM AWARE.


WINIFRED MENTIONED THAT THE PROFESSOR MET MR. STRASSMANN THROUGH A LONDON CLUB WITH A ROSE SYMBOL.
I FOUND THIS INVITATION AMONGST HIS PAPERS. ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH WHAT ORGANIZATION THE SYMBOL REPRESENTS? SOME ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY, PERHAPS?
WHY, THIS LOOKS LIKE A ROSE CROSS, THE EMBLEM OF THE ROSICRUCIAN ORDER! I DIDN'T REALIZE THOMSEN WAS A MEMBER.
I'VE HEARD OF THE ROSICRUCIANS. A SECRET SOCIETY DEDICATED TO THE STUDY OF ARCANE KNOWLEDGE, PARTICULARLY ALCHEMY. THE SUBJECT, I UNDERSTAND, OF THE TEXT YOU FOUND?
TEXT? ARE YOU REFERRING TO THE AKKADIAN TEXT I GAVE THE PROFESSOR TO TRANSLATE? THAT WASN'T A TEXT ON ALCHEMY.
I FOUND IT IN THE RUINS OF AN ANCIENT CITY NEAR HARAPPA, RUINS THAT PROVE AN EARLY CIVILIZATION EXISTED IN THE INDUS VALLEY DURING THE TIME OF THE AKKADIAN EMPIRE. BUT THE CITY WAS SUDDENLY ABANDONED.
I HAD HOPED TO FIND CLUES TO ITS DECLINE IN THE PROFESSOR'S TRANSLATION, PERHAPS ACCOUNTS OF WAR OR PESTILENCE OR SOME OTHER DISASTER, BUT THERE WAS ACTUALLY NO REFERENCE TO THE HARAPPAN CITY AT ALL.
IT WAS JUST A CHRONICLE OF AN AKKADIAN MAN'S JOURNEY FROM ASSYRIA TO SOME MINES IN AFRICA.
WINIFRED SAID THE PROFESSOR IS IN AFRICA SEARCHING FOR A MYTHOLOGICAL LOST CITY, A SECRET TREASURE HOUSE OF THE GODS.
YES, PROFESSOR THOMSEN BELIEVES THE MINES DESCRIBED IN THE TEXT ARE IN A LEGENDARY CITY FROM BABYLONIAN AND SUMERIAN MYTHS, BUT THE TEXT ITSELF NEVER MENTIONED ANY TREASURES, JUST MUNDANE METALLURGICAL OPERATIONS.


MIGHT THOSE METALLURGICAL OPERATIONS BE INTERPRETED AS BEING OF AN ALCHEMICAL NATURE?
I SUPPOSE. BUT I CAN ASSURE YOU, PROFESSOR THOMSEN WOULD NOT BE ONE TO WASTE HIS TIME ON A FANCIFUL QUEST FOR AN ALCHEMICAL FORMULA.
SIMPLY CONFIRMING THE EXISTENCE OF THIS CITY WOULD BE A REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENT. WORTH MORE THAN GOLD TO AN ARCHAEOLOGIST.

PERHAPS SO, BUT TO EVERYONE ELSE, A SECRET FORMULA FOR PRODUCING AN ALMOST LIMITLESS AMOUNT OF GOLD WOULD BE PRICELESS.
EVEN IF THE FORMULA DOES NOT TRULY EXIST, SOMEONE OUT THERE BELIEVES IT DOES. AND THEY'VE TAKEN WINIFRED.
THE ROSICRUCIANS ARE MY STRONGEST CLUE. DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHERE I MIGHT FIND THEM?
HAVE YOU INSPECTED THE INVITATION?
NO ADDRESS WAS GIVEN.
THEY WERE KNOWN TO HAVE HIDDEN MESSAGES IN THEIR INVITATIONS. A TEST, IF YOU WILL, OF A CANDIDATE'S WORTHINESS TO JOIN THEIR RANKS.
THE ONLY THING IT SAYS IS "PROFESSOR HENRY LOUIS THOMSEN, YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO JOIN OUR ESTEEMED ESTABLISHMENT, C.R." THERE'S NO HIDDEN MESSAGE THAT I CAN DISCERN.
THERE MAY BE MORE TO IT THAN CAN BE SEEN BY THE NAKED EYE.
AH, LOOK! THIS LINE HERE THAT APPEARS TO BE DECORATIVE ACTUALLY CONTAINS TINY LETTERS.
E WISE
"TO THE WISE AND UNDERSTANDING READER, WISDOM IS TO A MAN AN INFINITE TREASURE FOR SHE IS THE BREATH OF THE POWER OF GOD."

IT'S FROM *FAMA FRATERNITATIS*, THE ORIGINAL ROSICRUCIAN MANIFESTO.
THAT CONFIRMS THE INVITATION IS FROM THE ROSICRUCIANS, BUT THERE'S STILL NO CLUE HOW TO FIND THEM.
MAY I BORROW YOUR LENSES?
MOST CERTAINLY.
HMMM... THE LINE APPEARS TO BE WRITTEN USING TWO DIFFERENT TYPE SETTINGS. THIS LETTER "*E*" IS NOTICEABLY DIFFERENT FROM THIS OTHER "*E*".
I THINK IT'S WRITTEN IN A BACONIAN CIPHER. DO YOU HAVE A PEN AND PAPER?
WHAT IS A BACONIAN CIPHER?
A CODE, DEVISED BY SIR FRANCIS BACON -- WHO, I BELIEVE, WAS A MEMBER OF THE ROSICRUCIAN ORDER. IT CAN BE USED TO HIDE A MESSAGE IN ANY INNOCUOUS LOOKING DOCUMENT.
EVERY FIVE LETTERS REPRESENTS ONE LETTER IN THE SECRET MESSAGE USING A CODE LIKE THIS. THE FIRST TYPEFACE IS "*1*" AND THE SECOND IS "*2*".
CLEVER.
THE CODE IS DIFFICULT TO DETECT, BUT ONCE SEEN IT'S SIMPLE TO DECIPHER.
THERE!
THIRTY-THREE PALL MALL. AN ADDRESS IN THE ST. JAMES QUARTER OF LONDON, ALSO KNOWN AS CLUBLAND.

MEANWHILE...
〈WHEN WE ARRIVE, SECURE THE GIRL QUICKLY AND QUIETLY IN THE TOWER BASEMENT.〉*
〈WE WANT TO AVOID ANY CIVILIANS MAKING NOTE OF HER PRESENCE.〉
〈AND GET EVERYTHING PREPARED FOR OUR DEPARTURE TOMORROW.〉
〈YES, HELFERIN KRALLE.〉
GNAW GNAW GNAW
〈WE LEAVE AT FIRST LIGHT.〉
〈THE DIREKTOR WANTS HER IN AFRICA AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. IT SEEMS THE GOOD PROFESSOR IS NOT BEING VERY COOPERATIVE. WE SHALL SEE IF HIS GRANDDAUGHTER'S COMPANY WILL IMPROVE HIS DISPOSITION.〉
〈YES, HELFERIN.〉
:GASP!:
AAHHHHH!!!
*TRANSLATED FROM GERMAN.

AAAAHHHH!!!
BLÖDEL! YOU STUPID GIRL!
NO! NO! LET ME GO!
SLAP
SOLDAT SCHLUSSER!

〈IS THERE A PROBLEM?〉
〈NO PROBLEM, *HELFERIN*. THE LITTLE FOOL TRIED TO ESCAPE AND ALMOST FELL OUT THE BACK.〉
〈YOU WERE CHARGED WITH KEEPING HER SAFE, *SOLDAT*. WHY WAS SHE NOT PROPERLY SECURED?〉

DO NOT BE FRIGHTENED, CHILD. MY NAME IS *FRÄULEIN* KRALLE. I AM AN ASSOCIATE OF *HERR* STRASSMAN, WHO IS WORKING WITH YOUR GRANDFATHER.
YOU'RE FRIENDS WITH MR. STRASSMANN?
YES, INDEED. MR. STRASSMANN AND I ARE VERY GOOD FRIENDS.
〈WHY IS SHE MARKED?〉
〈SHE...I... I THOUGHT SHE SHOULD BE DISCIPLINED.〉
〈*YOU* ARE NOT BEING PAID TO THINK. IF ANYTHING ELSE UNPLEASANT SHOULD HAPPEN TO HER, ANYTHING AT ALL, I WILL HOLD YOU PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE.〉
〈AND THEN I WILL BE FORCED TO BE VERY... ***UNPLEASANT***...WITH YOU.〉
〈DO YOU UNDERSTAND?〉
〈YE...YES, *HELFERIN.*〉
MISS WINIFRED IS MY GUEST. I WILL NOT HAVE HER HARMED IN ANY MANNER WHILE SHE IS UNDER MY CARE.
I APOLOGIZE, *LIEBCHEN*, IF MY GUARDS HAVE MISTREATED YOU. MEN CAN BE SUCH BRUTES.
THESE RESTRAINTS ARE FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY, SO DO NOT REMOVE THEM AGAIN! THE FLIGHT CAN BE QUITE ROUGH AND I WOULD NOT WISH YOU TO FALL.
BE AT EASE, YOUNG *FRÄULEIN*. I AM TAKING YOU TO YOUR GRANDFATHER.

EVENING, LONDON, ST. JAMES DISTRICT.
PARDON ME, MUM.
HOLD ON THERE!
IS THERE A PROBLEM, MISS?
NO PROBLEM, CONSTABLE. THIS YOUNG MAN WAS SIMPLY HELPING ME RETRIEVE SOMETHING I DROPPED. ISN'T THAT RIGHT?
UH... YES, SIR.
VERY WELL THEN. GOOD DAY, MISS.
YOU SHALL HAVE TO BE LESS OBVIOUS IF YOU WISH TO AVOID THE WORKHOUSE -- AND THE GALLOWS.
NOW, ONE FAVOR DESERVES ANOTHER. WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THAT BUILDING THERE?

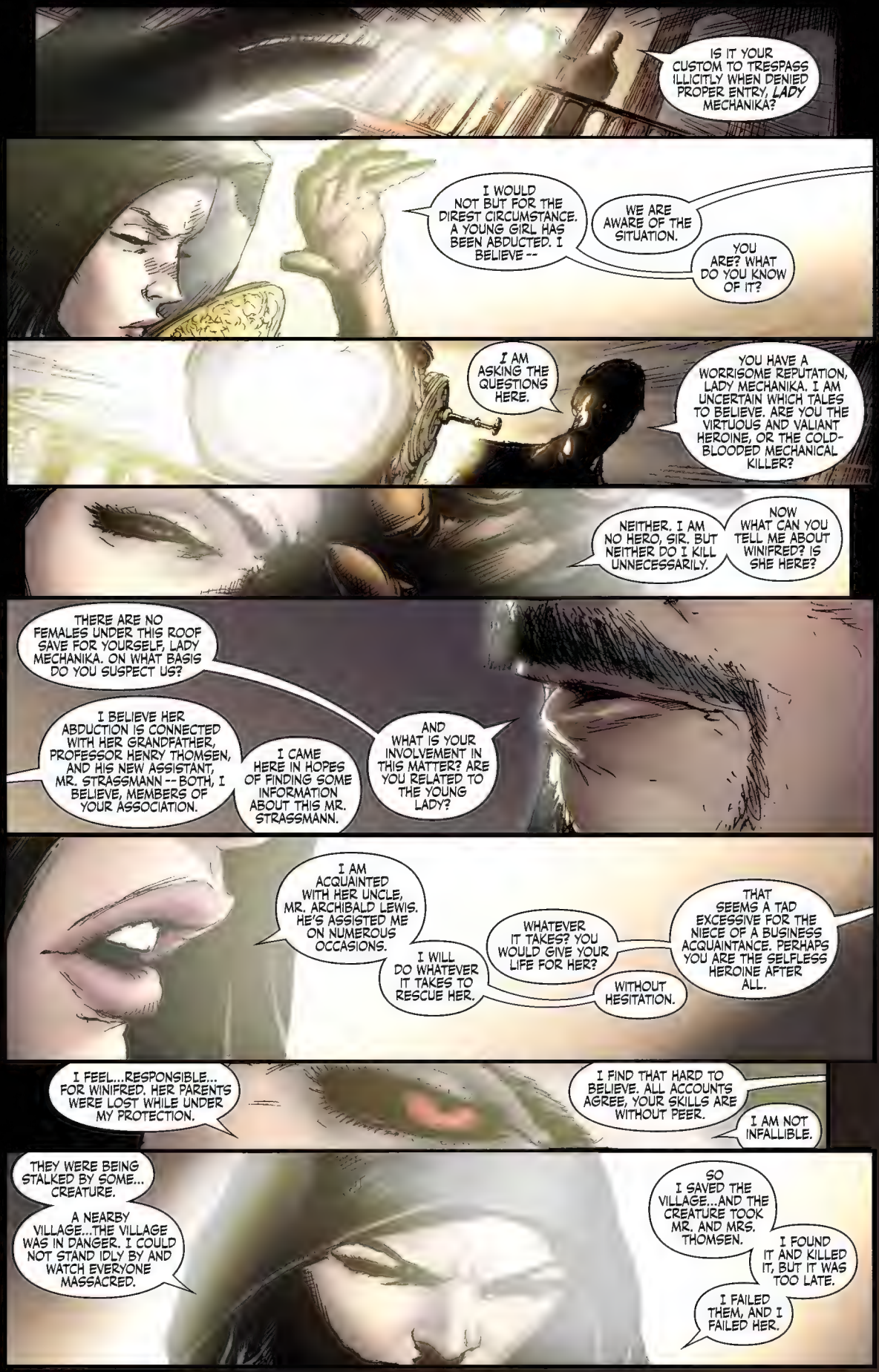
NUMBER 33? YOU DON' WANT T' BE GOING THERE, MUM! DEVIL WORSHIPPERS THEY ARE!
DEVIL WORSHIPPERS! WHY WOULD YOU SAY SUCH A THING?
SEEN 'EM I HAVE, WITH THEIR MASKS AND HOODS. WE ALL KNOW T' STAY AWAY. YOU SHOULD TOO.
THANK YOU FOR THE TIP. NOW BUG OFF.
THANK YOU, MUM.
OH, AND I PROMISE TO BE LESS OBVIOUS NEXT TIME!
:HAH: CHEEKY LITTLE BUGGER.
KNOCK KNOCK
GOOD EVENING. I AM LADY MECHANIKA. I HAVE A FEW QUESTIONS REGARDING AN INVESTIGATION I'M CONDUCTING.
IS THERE SOMEONE IN CHARGE I MIGHT SPEAK WITH FOR A BRIEF MOMENT?
MEMBERS ONLY.
NO WOMEN.
SLAM!
WHAT THE --?!
I'M LOOKING FOR A FRIEND OF MINE.
I HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE SOMEONE HERE MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP ME LOCATE HER.
KA KA KLONK
PLEASE! IT'S A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH!
HELLO!
THUMP THUMP THUMP
BLOODY WANKER!

A FEW MOMENTS LATER.
VERY WELL. IF THEY INSIST ON BEING UNREASONABLE ABOUT IT...
KAT KAT KAT
...I HAVE NO RECOURSE BUT TO PURSUE AN ALTERNATE MEANS OF ENTRY.
THUNK

kREEEEE
THE ROSICRUCIAN ORDER IS SUPPOSEDLY DEDICATED TO THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE, AND THE "ENLIGHTENMENT OF MAN" THROUGH THE ARTS AND SCIENCES.
MR. BANERJI INSISTS THAT ALCHEMY IS OF INTEREST TO ONLY A SMALL MINORITY OF ROSICRUCIANS...
...AND HAS NOT BEEN THE PREVAILING SUBJECT OF STUDY FOR CENTURIES, NOT SINCE ALCHEMY GAVE WAY TO ITS MORE RESPECTABLE FORM, CHEMISTRY.
KLUMP KLUMP KLUMP
HRRFFMMM...
UNGH...
THONK
THE ROSICRUCIANS MAY VERY WELL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR CHEMISTRY AS WE KNOW IT TODAY, A PRODUCT OF THEIR APPLICATION OF SCIENTIFIC METHODOLOGIES TO ANCIENT ALCHEMICAL PRACTICES.
BUT I MISTRUST AN ASSOCIATION THAT CLAIMS TO REVERE LEARNING WHILE SHROUDING ITSELF IN SILENCE AND SECRECY.
WHAT POSSIBLE HARM COULD ARISE FROM THE DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE?

DESPITE THEIR DECLARATIONS OF "ENLIGHTENMENT," THE ROSICRUCIANS APPEAR TO BE JUST ANOTHER ELITIST FRATERNITY.
GONG
GONG
GONG
AFTER ALL, NO SCHOLASTIC SOCIETY THAT RESTRICTS MEMBERSHIP BASED SOLELY ON GENDER CAN TRULY BE CONSIDERED "ENLIGHTENED."
CANDIDATES, TAKE YOUR PLACES.
BRETHREN, WE ARE GATHERED HERE TODAY TO CONFER THE FOURTH DEGREE OF PHILOSOPHUS UPON THESE INITIATES.
BROTHER WOODMAN, STEP FORWARD...

THE PURPOSE OF SUCH ELABORATE RITUALS ELUDES ME.
THEY SEEK TO MIMIC RITES OF WHICH I DOUBT THEY HAVE ANY TRUE UNDERSTANDING.
IF THEY HAD SEEN THE THINGS I HAVE SEEN, THEY WOULD NOT PLAY AT SUCH *MYSTERIES*.
BUT THE GATHERING SHOULD AT LEAST PROVIDE ME WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEARCH THE PREMISES UNIMPEDED.
THERE MUST BE AN OFFICE OR SOMETHING WITH A RECORD OF THIS MR. STRASSMANN.
I BELIEVE YOU ASKED TO SPEAK WITH SOMEONE IN CHARGE.
KLANK
MY APOLOGIES FOR THE INTRUSION. I AM--
WE KNOW WHO YOU ARE.


IS IT YOUR CUSTOM TO TRESPASS ILLICITLY WHEN DENIED PROPER ENTRY, LADY MECHANIKA?
I WOULD NOT BUT FOR THE DIREST CIRCUMSTANCE. A YOUNG GIRL HAS BEEN ABDUCTED. I BELIEVE --
WE ARE AWARE OF THE SITUATION.
YOU ARE? WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF IT?
I AM ASKING THE QUESTIONS HERE.
YOU HAVE A WORRISOME REPUTATION, LADY MECHANIKA. I AM UNCERTAIN WHICH TALES TO BELIEVE. ARE YOU THE VIRTUOUS AND VALIANT HEROINE, OR THE COLD-BLOODED MECHANICAL KILLER?
NEITHER. I AM NO HERO, SIR. BUT NEITHER DO I KILL UNNECESSARILY.
NOW WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT WINIFRED? IS SHE HERE?
THERE ARE NO FEMALES UNDER THIS ROOF SAVE FOR YOURSELF, LADY MECHANIKA. ON WHAT BASIS DO YOU SUSPECT US?
I BELIEVE HER ABDUCTION IS CONNECTED WITH HER GRANDFATHER, PROFESSOR HENRY THOMSEN, AND HIS NEW ASSISTANT, MR. STRASSMANN -- BOTH, I BELIEVE, MEMBERS OF YOUR ASSOCIATION.
I CAME HERE IN HOPES OF FINDING SOME INFORMATION ABOUT THIS MR. STRASSMANN.
AND WHAT IS YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THIS MATTER? ARE YOU RELATED TO THE YOUNG LADY?
I AM ACQUAINTED WITH HER UNCLE, MR. ARCHIBALD LEWIS. HE'S ASSISTED ME ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS.
I WILL DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO RESCUE HER.
WHATEVER IT TAKES? YOU WOULD GIVE YOUR LIFE FOR HER?
WITHOUT HESITATION.
THAT SEEMS A TAD EXCESSIVE FOR THE NIECE OF A BUSINESS ACQUAINTANCE. PERHAPS YOU ARE THE SELFLESS HEROINE AFTER ALL.
I FEEL...RESPONSIBLE... FOR WINIFRED. HER PARENTS WERE LOST WHILE UNDER MY PROTECTION.
I FIND THAT HARD TO BELIEVE. ALL ACCOUNTS AGREE, YOUR SKILLS ARE WITHOUT PEER.
I AM NOT INFALLIBLE.
THEY WERE BEING STALKED BY SOME... CREATURE.
A NEARBY VILLAGE...THE VILLAGE WAS IN DANGER. I COULD NOT STAND IDLY BY AND WATCH EVERYONE MASSACRED.
SO I SAVED THE VILLAGE...AND THE CREATURE TOOK MR. AND MRS. THOMSEN.
I FOUND IT AND KILLED IT, BUT IT WAS TOO LATE.
I FAILED THEM, AND I FAILED HER.

I WILL NOT FAIL HER AGAIN.
KLANK
I AM CALLED JABIR.
YOUR ARRIVAL IS FORTUITOUS, LADY MECHANIKA. I AM IN NEED OF SOMEONE WITH YOUR ABILITIES AND I BELIEVE OUR OBJECTIVES, FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST, ARE IN ACCORD.
I AM NOT--
WE HAVE BEEN RECEIVING SOME DISTURBING NEWS OF LATE FROM OUR SISTER ORGANIZATION IN GERMANY.
GERMANY?
PARTICULARLY FROM PROFESSOR TACKE, MR. STRASSMANN'S SPONSOR, ABOUT A CLANDESTINE GROUP COMMANDEERING PARTS OF THEIR UNIVERSITY RESEARCH FACILITY.
JUST THIS EVENING, WE RECEIVED A CABLE FROM HIM ABOUT THE ARRIVAL OF SOME SOLDIERS WITH WHAT APPEARED TO BE A YOUNG CHILD.
WINIFRED.
WAIT. IT COULDN'T BE. SHE WAS STOLEN JUST THIS MORNING, A COUPLE HOURS BEFORE NOON. THEY COULD NOT HAVE MADE IT TO GERMANY SO SOON.
NOT BY COMMERCIAL MEANS, NO. BUT PRIVATE AIRSHIPS AND MILITARY CRAFT CAN TRAVEL MUCH FASTER THAN THE SHIPS WITH WHICH YOU ARE ACCUSTOMED.
COME WITH ME.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?
WHY, TO GERMANY, OF COURSE.

Chapter Three

"Behind the veil of all the hieratic and mystical allegories of ancient doctrines...in the cryptic emblems of our old books on alchemy, in the ceremonies practised at reception by all secret societies, there are found indications of a doctrine which is everywhere the same and everywhere carefully concealed."

-Eliphas Lévi,
Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie
(Dogmas and Rituals of High Magic)

AFRICA.
I THINK I HAVE DETERMINED THE FIRST PART OF THEIR PROCESS HERE. THEY DISSOLVED THE PITCHBLENDE FROM THE MINES IN *AQUA FORTIS* TO FORM THIS POWDER...
HOW CAN YOU BE HELPING THESE PEOPLE, MR. STRASSMAN?
I REALIZE YOU OWE A DEBT TO YOUR UNIVERSITY, BUT THIS! THIS COMMANDEERING OF MY ENTERPRISE IS OUTRAGEOUS!
I AM TERRIBLY SORRY, PROFESSOR. I SHOULD NEVER HAVE ASKED TO JOIN YOUR EXPEDITION. I SWEAR, I DID NOT KNOW THIS WOULD HAPPEN.
BUT I DO NOT BELIEVE THESE MEN WERE SENT BY THE UNIVERSITY. THEY DO NOT ACT LIKE ORDINARY HIRED GUARDS. I THINK THEY ARE MILITARY.
I THINK THEY MAY BE... *GEHEIMPOLIZEI*.
SECRET POLICE?
SINCE WHEN DOES YOUR UNIVERSITY ANSWER TO THE GERMAN SECRET POLICE?
THEY RECEIVE MUCH FUNDING FROM THE GOVERNMENT. IT PAYS FOR MY SCHOLARSHIP.
THE UNIVERSITY MUST CERTAINLY SEND REPORTS TO THE GOVERNMENT ABOUT HOW THEIR MONEYS ARE BEING SPENT, JUST AS I MUST SEND MY REPORTS TO MY ADVISOR.
BUT WHAT COULD POSSIBLY HAVE BEEN IN THOSE REPORTS TO ATTRACT THE ATTENTION OF THE SECRET POLICE?
THE *GEHEIMPOLIZEI* WOULD NOT BE INVOLVED UNLESS THERE WAS A THREAT TO THE STATE SECURITY.
THREAT? NOTHING HERE POSES A THREAT TO THE GERMAN EMPIRE! THIS IS A PURELY SCHOLASTIC EXPEDITION!
ARE THEY WORRIED WE MIGHT ACTUALLY UNCOVER SOME ANCIENT FORMULA FOR CREATING GOLD?

THE LEGENDS SAY THAT "HE WHO HOLDS THE TABLET OF DESTINIES WILL RULE THE WORLD."
YOU CANNOT SERIOUSLY BELIEVE IT GRANTS MAGICAL POWERS!
I BELIEVE IT RECORDS AN ANCIENT ALCHEMICAL FORMULA, AS I SAY IN MY REPORTS, A SCIENTIFIC FORMULA THAT GRANTS THE POWER OF KNOWLEDGE, BUT THEY MAY--
PROFESSOR THOMSEN!
HAVE YOU HAD ANY PROGRESS IN UNCOVERING THE TABLET?
NO, THERE IS NO MENTION OF IT IN ANY OF THESE WRITINGS. I AM AFRAID WE WERE MISTAKEN. THIS APPEARS TO BE ONLY A SIMPLE MINING OPERATION.
ALTHOUGH THAT IN ITSELF IS NOT WITHOUT VALUE, THAT THE SUMERIANS SHOULD TRAVEL SO FAR. WHAT PRECIOUS METALS DID THEY SEEK THAT THEY COULD NOT ACQUIRE ELSEWHERE? AND THERE ARE MANY DETAILED DESCRIPTIONS OF THE REFINING PROCESSES THEY--
WE ARE NOT INTERESTED IN THE MINING DESCRIPTIONS, PROFESSOR. I SUGGEST YOU FOCUS YOUR EFFORTS ON FINDING THE TABLET.
PERHAPS THIS WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH SOME MOTIVATION TO WORK MORE QUICKLY.
WHAT... WHAT'S THIS?
A REMINDER, PROFESSOR.
A REMINDER THAT YOUR GRANDDAUGHTER IS ANXIOUS FOR YOU TO COMPLETE YOUR WORK HERE SO YOU CAN BOTH RETURN HOME.
YOU... YOU'VE TAKEN WINIFRED?
EVERY DAY I AM UNSATISFIED WITH YOUR WORK, I WILL SEND YOU ANOTHER GIFT.
AND NEXT TIME, IT WILL BE A PIECE THAT WILL NOT GROW BACK.

PLEASE, MR. DIREKTOR! OUR SUPPOSITIONS WERE INCORRECT. THE TABLET IS NOT HERE! THIS IS JUST A MINING SITE!
VERY WELL. I SUPPOSE THIS EXPEDITION HAS BEEN A LOSS.
PREPARE THE AIRSHIP! WE ARE LEAVING IMMEDIATELY.
YOU...YOU'RE LETTING US GO?
OF COURSE. I HAVE NO INTEREST IN MINING RECORDS. YOU MAY CONTINUE YOUR WORK UNHINDERED.
AND WINIFRED?
SHE IS OF NO FURTHER USE TO ME.
KILL THE GIRL.
NO! WAIT!
MAYBE... MAYBE WE'VE MISSED SOMETHING. LET US CONTINUE SEARCHING.
GOOD. DO NOT DISAPPOINT ME AGAIN, PROFESSOR.

GERMANY
LADY MECHANIKA, ARE YOU READY? WE ARE APPROACHING OUR DESTINATION.
LOOK. YOU CAN SEE IT NOW.
WHERE? IS THE UNIVERSITY LOCATED IN THE CASTLE?
THE DEPARTMENT OF ADVANCED CHEMICAL RESEARCH IS LOCATED HERE, YES, AWAY FROM THE MAIN CAMPUS. CHEMICAL EXPERIMENTS CAN BE DANGEROUS.
MY ASSOCIATE TELLS ME THE SOLDIERS HAVE TAKEN OVER THE WEST TOWER. THE REST OF THE CASTLE SHOULD BE DESERTED AT THIS HOUR.
IS IT WISE TO BE SMOKING HERE, MR. JABIR? I UNDERSTAND THE LIFTING GAS IS HIGHLY FLAMMABLE.
IT IS PERFECTLY SAFE. THE GAS IS HOUSED IN SEALED BALLONETS. THEY CANNOT BE COMPROMISED.
AND THIS CONTRAPTION IS PERFECTLY SAFE AS WELL?
MOST ASSUREDLY.
NOW REMEMBER, THE LEFT MECHANISM CONTROLS STEERING AND THE RIGHT CONTROLS LIFT.
I UNDERSTAND.

GOOD LUCK!
VROOOM

I REMAIN UNSURE OF MR. JABIR'S INTENTIONS, AND OF HIS MYSTERIOUS ORGANIZATION.
HE IS CRYPTIC AND ELUSIVE WHEN I QUESTION HIS INTEREST IN THIS MATTER.
AND I MISTRUST ANY WHO WOULD PROFFER THEIR ASSISTANCE FOR NO DISCERNIBLE GAIN.
KAT
KAT
KAT
BUT...I AM LEFT WITH NO OTHER OPTIONS.
IF THERE IS ANY CHANCE HIS INFORMATION IS CORRECT AND CAN HELP ME FIND WINIFRED, I MUST ACCEPT HIS AID, WHATEVER HIS ULTERIOR MOTIVES MAY BE.
=YAWN=
UGH...
WHERE'S THE GIRL?
VA...WAS?

WO IST DAS MÄDCHEN?
UN...UNTEN!
THUNP!
OOOMPH!
KREEEE
THWAK

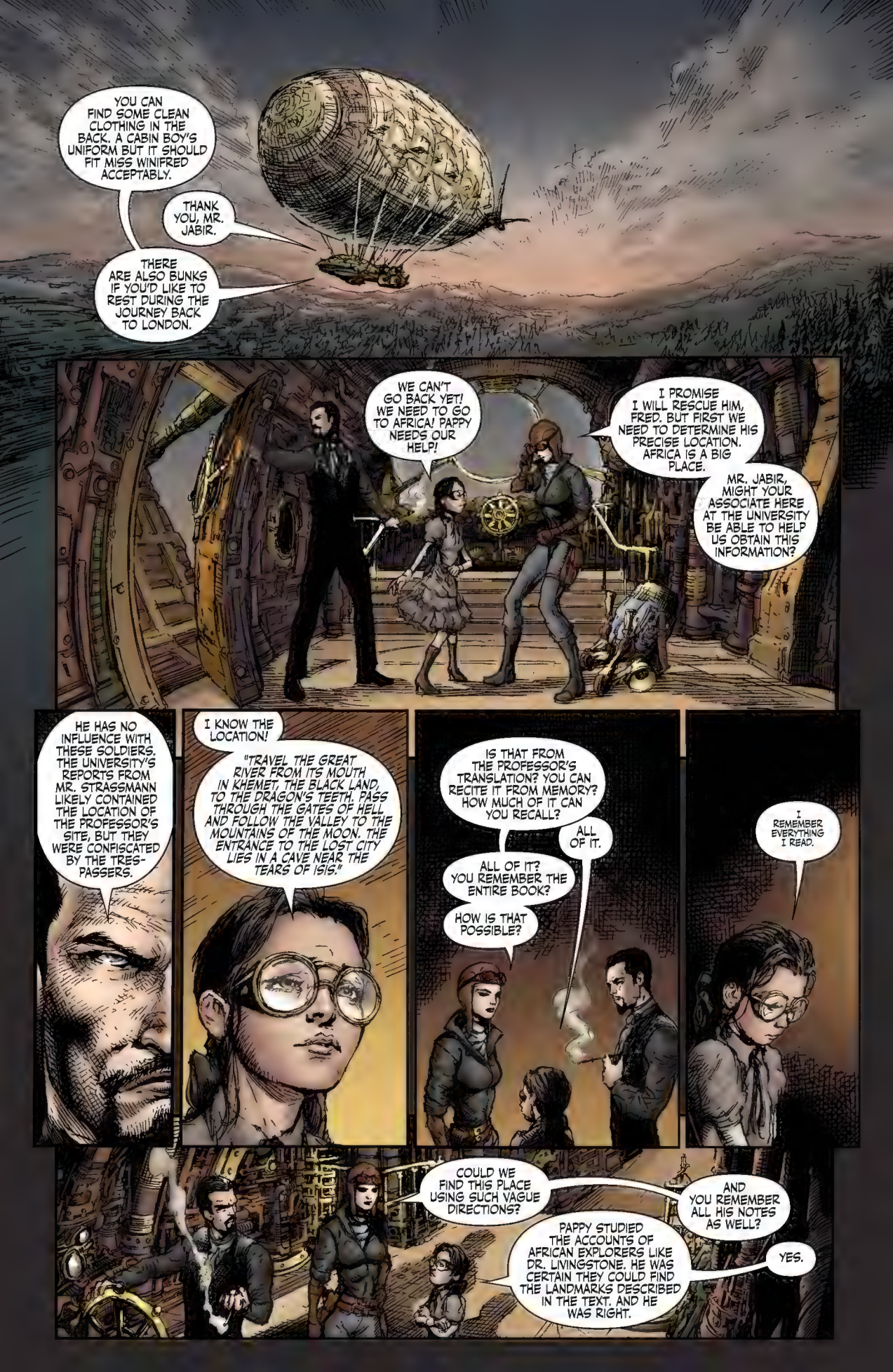
WINIFRED!
LADY MECHANIKA?
COME ON. LET'S GET YOU OUT OF HERE.
WAIT! THEY HAVE PAPPY! THE RED LADY SAID SO! FRÄULEIN KRALLE!
THE PROFESSOR? HE'S HERE?
NO. THEY WERE TAKING ME TO HIM FIRST THING IN THE MORNING. TO AFRICA.
SHE SAID SOMETHING ABOUT HIM NOT COOPERATING.
WE'LL FIND HIM, FRED. I PROMISE. BUT RIGHT NOW WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE. IT'S ALMOST MORNING.
WAS IST PASSIERT!
THEY'RE COMING!
COME NOW, I HAVE TO CARRY YOU THE REST OF THE WAY.
KAT KAT KAT
ALMOST THERE!
VWOOSH

WINIFRED, I WILL BE UNABLE TO CARRY YOU WHILST CONTROLLING THIS FLYING MACHINE.
I NEED YOU TO HOLD ON TO ME AS TIGHT AS YOU CAN. DO YOU THINK YOU CAN DO THAT?
I CAN DO IT.
VERY WELL. HERE WE GO--
KLANK
UNGH!
LADY MECHANIKA!
HYAH!
OOOOMPH!
‹STOP THEM!›*
‹YES, HELFERIN!›
*TRANSLATED FROM GERMAN.

YAAW!
ARGGH!
UGH...
DON'T LET GO, FRED!
THWAK!
UNGH...
THMK!
ARGG...
KRAK!
UHH...
HOLD ON!

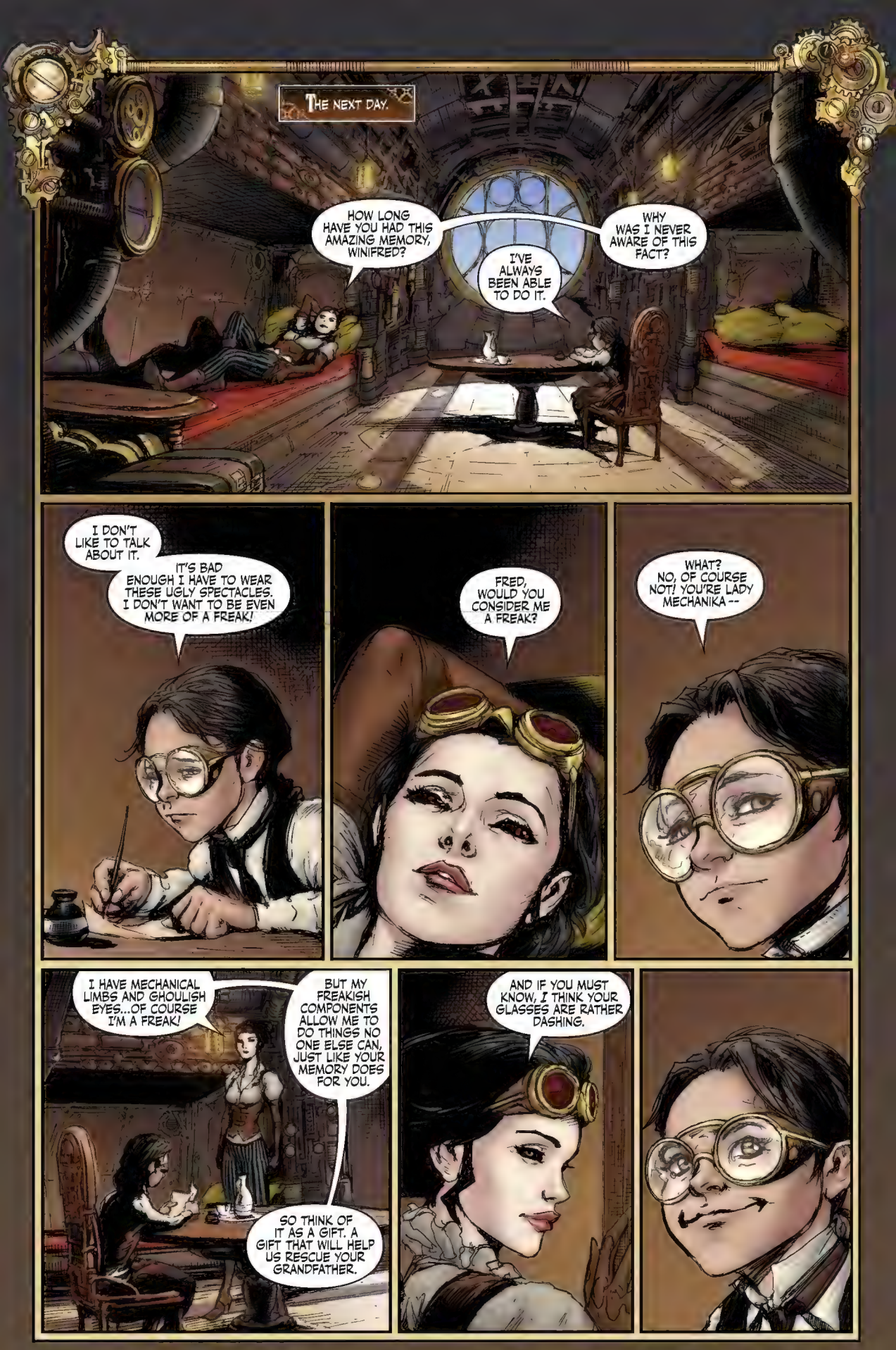
VROOOSH
UNGH!
THOOK!
AAAAHH!
UGH...
WHOO
KLANK!
AAAAHH!
<STOP THEM! STOP THEM!>

‹IDIOT! YOU MIGHT HIT THE GIRL!›
HOLD ON JUST A LITTLE LONGER, FRED! THE MACHINE HAS BEEN DAMAGED, BUT WE ARE ALMOST THERE!
PUT PUT PUT
MECHANIKA!
‹SEND THE BIRDS! AND GET MY SHIP READY!›
‹HURRY!›


YOU CAN FIND SOME CLEAN CLOTHING IN THE BACK. A CABIN BOY'S UNIFORM BUT IT SHOULD FIT MISS WINIFRED ACCEPTABLY.
THANK YOU, MR. JABIR.
THERE ARE ALSO BUNKS IF YOU'D LIKE TO REST DURING THE JOURNEY BACK TO LONDON.
WE CAN'T GO BACK YET! WE NEED TO GO TO AFRICA! PAPPY NEEDS OUR HELP!
I PROMISE I WILL RESCUE HIM, FRED. BUT FIRST WE NEED TO DETERMINE HIS PRECISE LOCATION. AFRICA IS A BIG PLACE.
MR. JABIR, MIGHT YOUR ASSOCIATE HERE AT THE UNIVERSITY BE ABLE TO HELP US OBTAIN THIS INFORMATION?
HE HAS NO INFLUENCE WITH THESE SOLDIERS. THE UNIVERSITY'S REPORTS FROM MR. STRASSMANN LIKELY CONTAINED THE LOCATION OF THE PROFESSOR'S SITE, BUT THEY WERE CONFISCATED BY THE TRES-PASSERS.
I KNOW THE LOCATION!
"TRAVEL THE GREAT RIVER FROM ITS MOUTH IN KHEMET, THE BLACK LAND, TO THE DRAGON'S TEETH. PASS THROUGH THE GATES OF HELL AND FOLLOW THE VALLEY TO THE MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON. THE ENTRANCE TO THE LOST CITY LIES IN A CAVE NEAR THE TEARS OF ISIS."
IS THAT FROM THE PROFESSOR'S TRANSLATION? YOU CAN RECITE IT FROM MEMORY? HOW MUCH OF IT CAN YOU RECALL?
ALL OF IT.
ALL OF IT? YOU REMEMBER THE ENTIRE BOOK?
HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE?
I REMEMBER EVERYTHING I READ.
COULD WE FIND THIS PLACE USING SUCH VAGUE DIRECTIONS?
AND YOU REMEMBER ALL HIS NOTES AS WELL?
PAPPY STUDIED THE ACCOUNTS OF AFRICAN EXPLORERS LIKE DR. LIVINGSTONE. HE WAS CERTAIN THEY COULD FIND THE LANDMARKS DESCRIBED IN THE TEXT. AND HE WAS RIGHT.
YES.

WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO TAKE US TO AFRICA, MR. JABIR?
I HAVE ALWAYS FANCIED A TRIP TO THE DARK CONTINENT.
MOMENTS LATER.
〈WE ARE RECEIVING THE BEACON FROM OUR BIRD, HELFERIN!〉
〈THEY ARE TURNING SOUTH.〉
〈AFRICA. THEY WILL BE GOING TO LOOK FOR THE PROFESSOR.〉
〈FOLLOW THEM.〉

Variant Cover by
Joe Benitez & Sabine Rich


THE NEXT DAY.
HOW LONG HAVE YOU HAD THIS AMAZING MEMORY, WINIFRED?
I'VE ALWAYS BEEN ABLE TO DO IT.
WHY WAS I NEVER AWARE OF THIS FACT?
I DON'T LIKE TO TALK ABOUT IT.
IT'S BAD ENOUGH I HAVE TO WEAR THESE UGLY SPECTACLES. I DON'T WANT TO BE EVEN MORE OF A FREAK!
FRED, WOULD YOU CONSIDER ME A FREAK?
WHAT? NO, OF COURSE NOT! YOU'RE LADY MECHANIKA --
I HAVE MECHANICAL LIMBS AND GHOULISH EYES...OF COURSE I'M A FREAK!
BUT MY FREAKISH COMPONENTS ALLOW ME TO DO THINGS NO ONE ELSE CAN, JUST LIKE YOUR MEMORY DOES FOR YOU.
SO THINK OF IT AS A GIFT. A GIFT THAT WILL HELP US RESCUE YOUR GRANDFATHER.
AND IF YOU MUST KNOW, I THINK YOUR GLASSES ARE RATHER DASHING.

MY TURN AT THE WHEEL. GO GET SOME REST, MR. JABIR.
WE'RE ALMOST AT ALEXANDRIA. I PLAN ON STOPPING THERE FOR FUEL AND SUPPLIES. IT WILL BE A GOOD PLACE TO BEGIN OUR SEARCH, SINCE MISS WINIFRED DESCRIBES THE ROUTE AS FOLLOWING THE GREAT RIVER, THE RIVER NILE.
AND I HAVE SOME FRIENDS THERE WHO MAY BE ABLE TO HELP US.
FRIENDS?
AN ORDER COMPARABLE TO THE ROSICRUCIANS.
YOU STILL DON'T TRUST ME.
YOU ARE GOING A LONG WAY JUST TO HELP THE GRANDDAUGHTER OF A FELLOW CLUB MEMBER WITH WHOM YOU ARE BARELY ACQUAINTED.
PERHAPS *YOU* HAVE SOME INTEREST IN TURNING LEAD INTO GOLD?
ALCHEMY IS ABOUT MORE THAN JUST TURNING LEAD INTO GOLD, LADY MECHANIKA.
OH?
IT IS ABOUT STUDYING THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE, OF THE ESSENCE OF ALL MATTER. IF ONE TRULY UNDERSTANDS THESE SECRETS, TRANSMUTING ONE ELEMENT INTO ANOTHER BECOMES TRIVIAL.
BUT I DO NOT BELIEVE THESE SOLDIERS HAVE ANY INTEREST IN ESOTERIC KNOWLEDGE, ONLY ITS RESULTS.
GOLD.
NOT GOLD, LADY MECHANIKA. POWER.
A THOUSAND YEARS AGO, ANCIENT CHINESE ALCHEMISTS SEARCHING FOR THE SECRETS OF TRANSMUTATION ACCIDENTALLY STUMBLED UPON A NEW DISCOVERY.
THE ALCHEMISTS OF THE EAST WERE NOT ONLY CONCERNED WITH THE TRANSMUTATION OF MATTER, BUT ALSO OF THE SOUL. THEY BELIEVED THE STUDY OF ALCHEMY WOULD ULTIMATELY RESULT IN AN ELIXIR OF LIFE THAT TRANSFORMED THE SOUL TO A STATE BEYOND OUR PHYSICAL CONFINES.
BUT THEIR STUDIES RESULTED IN NEITHER GOLD NOR IMMORTALITY. INSTEAD, THEY DISCOVERED A SIMPLE BLACK POWDER.
A BLACK POWDER WITH NEVER BEFORE SEEN INCENDIARY PROPERTIES THAT WOULD CHANGE THE WORLD FOREVER.
GUNPOWDER.

ALCHEMY RESEARCH HAD BEEN FUNDED BY THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT, AND THE FIRST THING THEY DID WITH THE NEW DISCOVERY WAS TO FIND WAYS TO TURN IT INTO A WEAPON.
GUNS. CANNONS. BOMBS. WE ARE STILL TO THIS DAY USING IT IN NEW AND CREATIVE WAYS TO KILL ONE ANOTHER MORE EFFICIENTLY. WHO KNOWS WHAT NEW HORRORS MANKIND WILL REAP UPON ITSELF DUE TO THIS ONE ALCHEMY ACCIDENT.
AND YOU FEAR THE SECRET THE PROFESSOR HAS UNCOVERED CAN ALSO BE USED AS A WEAPON?
THERE IS AN OLD ASSYRIAN LEGEND OF GREAT WEAPONS HIDDEN UNDER A MOUNTAIN SOMEWHERE IN THE DARK CONTINENT.
ANY SUCH WEAPONS WOULD BE THOUSANDS OF YEARS OLD, EVEN OLDER THAN GUNPOWDER. SURELY ANYTHING THEY DISCOVERED WOULD BE WORTHLESS NOW COMPARED TO MODERN WEAPONRY?
KNOW OF ANY WEAPONS THAT CAN ANNIHILATE AN ENTIRE CITY IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE? LIKE THE THUNDERBOLT OF ZEUS, THE *BRAHMASTRA* OF THE *MAHABARATA*, OR THE BABYLONIAN *SHARUR*, OBLITERATOR OF MOUNTAINS.
THERE ARE MANY ACCOUNTS OF SUCH WEAPONS EXISTING IN ANCIENT TIMES.
THOSE ARE JUST MYTHS.
ARE THEY?
MANKIND IS NOT YET ENLIGHTENED ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND THESE MYSTERIES. IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT THE SECRETS OF SUCH WEAPONS REMAIN HIDDEN. THEY COULD VERY WELL LEAD TO THE ANNIHILATION OF THE HUMAN RACE.
ANYONE LOOKING FOR THEM MUST BE STOPPED AT ALL COSTS. DO YOU UNDERSTAND, LADY MECHANIKA?
WHATEVER THE COST.
THE GERMANS! HOW DID THEY FIND US?!

WHAT KIND OF WEAPONS DOES THIS SHIP HAVE?
THIS IS A LEISURE VEHICLE. THERE ARE NO WEAPONS.
CAN WE GO ANY FASTER?
NOT FASTER THAN THEM.
I'LL HAVE TO SHOOT THEM DOWN!
THERE'S A REAR PORT UPSTAIRS.
LADY MECHANIKA? WHAT'S WRONG?
YOUR ABDUCTORS HAVE FOUND US.
STAY DOWN HERE WITH MR. JABIR.
WHAT ABOUT YOU?
I MUST STOP THE SOLDIERS.

SHUK KLIK
BLAM
FIRE THE CANNON! TARGET THEIR BALLOON.
MECHANIKA! THE SHIP'S GOING DOWN!
GET THE AERO-PACK! YOU AND WINIFRED NEED TO GET OFF THE SHIP. NOW! IF THE GAS IGNITES, THE ENTIRE SHIP WILL BE ENGULFED IN SECONDS!
BUT HOW WILL YOU GET OUT?
I HAVE A PARACHUTE.
GO NOW! HURRY!
WROOSH WROO WROO

VROO VROO
<THERE'S THE GIRL! FOLLOW THEM!>
KLUNK
WHOOOSH

BWOOOOOM
JABIR!
UH OH...
WHOOOOSH
HOLD ON!
POOF
FRED! ARE YOU INJURED?
I... I'M FINE. BUT WHAT ABOUT MR. JABIR?
I THINK HE STEERED INTO THE OTHER SHIP DELIBERATELY.
I AM AFRAID HE...
HE HAD A PARACHUTE. I'M CERTAIN HE WAS ABLE TO ESCAPE BEFORE THE EXPLOSION.

WHERE ARE WE?

WE WERE NEAR ALEXANDRIA WHEN THEY FOUND US. I BELIEVE WE ARE STILL IN EGYPT, SOMEWHERE IN THE SAHARA.

THE SAHARA. THE LARGEST DESERT IN THE WORLD.

INDEED.

Chapter Four

"That which is below is like that which is above and that which is above is like that which is below."

–Tabula Smaragdina
(The Emerald Tablet)
Newton translation

AFRICA
SCRATCHES ARE ON THE FLOOR HERE THAT GO INTO THE WALL.
POSSIBLY ANOTHER HIDDEN DOOR? BUT NO CLUE HOW TO OPEN IT.
WE CAN FORCE IT OPEN.
BRING THE EXPLOSIVES.
EXPLOSIVES?
ARE YOU MAD?!
AN EXPLOSION DOWN HERE COULD BRING THE ENTIRE MOUNTAIN DOWN UPON US!
HE IS RIGHT, DIREKTOR. IT IS TOO DANGEROUS.
YOU HAVE UNTIL THE EXPLOSIVES ARRIVE TO FIND AN ALTERNATE SOLUTION. I WILL NOT TOLERATE ANY MORE DELAYS, PROFESSOR.
MR. STRASSMANN, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THIS? THE BASES OF SOME OF THESE PILLARS CAN MOVE.
I THOUGHT THEY WERE JUST LOOSE DECORATIVE PIECES, BUT PERHAPS THERE IS SOME MECHANISM THAT MIGHT OPEN THE DOOR?
MAYBE.
WHAT ARE THESE SYMBOLS?
A SERIES OF RANDOM NUMBERS. EACH PILLAR HAS A DIFFERENT ONE.
TEN, ONE, FIVE, NINE, SIX, FOUR.
TWO, NINE, FOUR, EIGHT, SIX, ONE.
NINE, THREE, SIX, ONE, EIGHT, FOUR.
IT MAY BE A PERMUTATION LOCK, TO BE UNLOCKED WITH THE CORRECT COMBINATION OF NUMBERS.

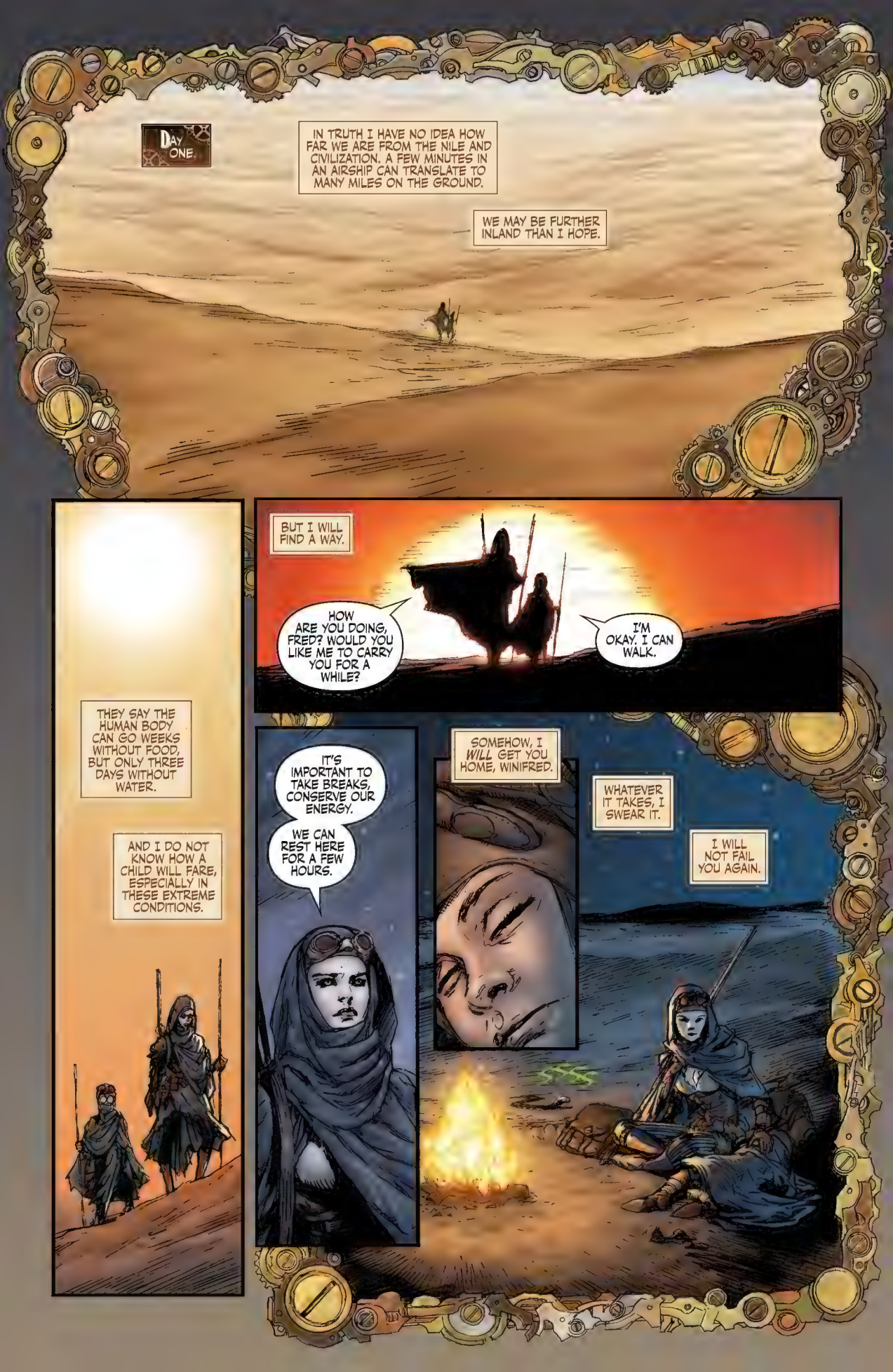
BUT THERE MUST BE HUNDREDS OF POSSIBLE COMBINATIONS! IT WILL TAKE FOREVER TO TRY EACH OF THEM!
TWO HUNDRED SIXTEEN POSSIBLE PERMUTATIONS. BUT I DO NOT THINK WE NEED TRY THEM ALL.
REMIND ME, PROFESSOR, WHAT WAS CARVED AT THE ENTRANCE?
"PLACED UPON THESE PILLARS ARE THREE ONES." COULD IT BE THAT SIMPLE?
THERE IS A ONE ON EACH PILLAR! LET US TRY.
GRNCH GRNCH
NOTHING.
IF NOT "ONES" PERHAPS PRIMES.
THE PRIME NUMBERS OF ARITHMETIC!
TWO...
GRNCH GRNCH
THREE...
GRNCH GRNCH
AND FIVE.
GCH
GCH
GCH
GCH

THE TABLET OF DESTINIES...

THE SAHARA DESERT
NGRNN
IS IT... IS IT MR. JABIR?
I... THERE IS NO WAY TO KNOW FOR CERTAIN.
YOU ONLY FOUND THREE BODIES. AND THERE WERE ONLY THREE SOLDIERS ON THE SHIP THAT TOOK ME.
MAYBE MR. JABIR GOT AWAY BEFORE THE EXPLOSION?

MAYBE.
DO NOT WORRY TOO MUCH, WINIFRED. MR. JABIR IS AN EXCEPTIONALLY RESOURCEFUL FELLOW.
I AM CERTAIN HE WILL FIND HIS WAY BACK TO CIVILIZATION SAFELY. AS SHALL WE.
HERE. WE CAN USE THESE RAGS TO PROTECT OURSELVES FROM THE SUN AND SAND.
WRAP IT LOOSELY AROUND YOU SO AIR CAN FLOW AND HELP TO KEEP YOU COOL.
THE RIVER SHOULD BE RELATIVELY CLOSE, A COUPLE DAYS WALK AT MOST.
WE'LL TRAVEL IN THE EVENINGS AND EARLY MORNINGS, AND TAKE SHELTER WHEN IT GETS TOO HOT.
THE SUN IS ALREADY GOING DOWN. WE CAN START WHENEVER YOU ARE READY.
I'M READY.
GOOD.

WE GO EAST.


DAY ONE.
IN TRUTH I HAVE NO IDEA HOW FAR WE ARE FROM THE NILE AND CIVILIZATION. A FEW MINUTES IN AN AIRSHIP CAN TRANSLATE TO MANY MILES ON THE GROUND.
WE MAY BE FURTHER INLAND THAN I HOPE.
THEY SAY THE HUMAN BODY CAN GO WEEKS WITHOUT FOOD, BUT ONLY THREE DAYS WITHOUT WATER.
AND I DO NOT KNOW HOW A CHILD WILL FARE, ESPECIALLY IN THESE EXTREME CONDITIONS.
BUT I WILL FIND A WAY.
HOW ARE YOU DOING, FRED? WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO CARRY YOU FOR A WHILE?
I'M OKAY. I CAN WALK.
IT'S IMPORTANT TO TAKE BREAKS, CONSERVE OUR ENERGY.
WE CAN REST HERE FOR A FEW HOURS.
SOMEHOW, I WILL GET YOU HOME, WINIFRED.
WHATEVER IT TAKES, I SWEAR IT.
I WILL NOT FAIL YOU AGAIN.

HSSSS
THUNK
DID YOU GET ANY SLEEP, LADY MECHANIKA?
I'LL SLEEP DURING THE DAY. LET'S SEE HOW MUCH FURTHER WE CAN GO BEFORE THE SUN RISES.
DAY TWO
IT'S STARTING TO GET WARM. WE SHOULD STOP AND BUILD A SHELTER.

FSH FSH FSH
GET SOME REST. I'LL TAKE THE FIRST WATCH.
WAKE ME WHEN IT'S MY TURN! I CAN WATCH TOO.
ZZZZZ
WHAT...
WHAT IS THAT?
LADY MECHANIKA!
WHAT'S WRONG?

IS IT A STORM?
OH BLOODY HELL!
IT'S A SANDSTORM!
HURRY! HELP ME PACK UP OUR THINGS.
WE NEED TO MOVE TO HIGHER GROUND. KEEP THE WIND TO OUR BACKS.
BUT WON'T THAT TAKE US IN THE WRONG DIRECTION?
IT CANNOT BE AVOIDED. IF WE DO NOT, WE WILL BECOME COMPLETELY BURIED BY THE SAND.
WE'LL WAIT IT OUT HERE! HOLD ON TO ME TIGHT!
WHOOSH
JUST CLOSE YOUR EYES AND STAY CALM.
I HAVE YOU.

MOMENTS LATER.
WINIFRED?
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? THE STORM HAS PASSED.
I'M FINE. JUST...
WATER! I SEE WATER!
CAREFUL, FRED. IT MAY BE AN ILLUSION. THE HEAT FROM THE SUN CAN FORM MIRAGES.
THAT IS POSSIBLE AS WELL. WE'LL TAKE A LOOK.
OR IT COULD BE AN OASIS!
IT'S HARD, LIKE GLASS.
SAND TURNS INTO GLASS WHEN IT'S MELTED.
A METEOR?
BUT WHAT'S HOT ENOUGH TO MELT SAND HERE?
HMMM. MAYBE.
COME. WE SHOULD GET BACK ON COURSE.

WINIFRED, HAS THE PROFESSOR EVER MENTIONED ANYTHING ABOUT MAGICAL WEAPONS HIDDEN IN THIS LOST CITY?
WEAPONS?
MR. JABIR SUGGESTED THAT IT MIGHT BE THE REASON FOR THE GERMANS' EXTREME INTEREST IN THE MATTER.
THAT THE PROFESSOR MAY HAVE STUMBLED UPON NOT ONLY A LEGENDARY TOME OF OBSCURE KNOWLEDGE, BUT AN ANCIENT WEAPON. SOMETHING CAPABLE OF MASSIVE DESTRUCTIVE POWER.
LIKE MELTING MILES AND MILES OF SAND?
PRECISELY.
THERE IS A STORY... WHEN THE TABLET WAS STOLEN, THE GOD OF WAR NINURTA USED THE SHARUR TO RETRIEVE IT AND RETURN IT TO ENKI.
THE SHARUR?
THE GREATEST WEAPON OF THE SUMERIANS.
"THE PERFECT WEAPON WHICH CONSUMES THE REBELLIOUS LAND LIKE FIRE. OBLITERATOR OF MOUNTAINS...THE RIGHT ARM OF LAGASH WHOSE AWESOME RADIANCE COVERS THE LAND."
OBLITERATOR OF MOUNTAINS...

Evening
LADY MECHANIKA?
WHAT--
MEN 'ANÄT?
HE ASKS WHO WE ARE.
YOU SPEAK ARABIC?
I CAN READ IT. BUT I THINK I UNDERSTAND HIM, MOSTLY.
TELL THEM WE HAD AN ACCIDENT--
AY! ABYÄD!
AH, ENGLISH I SEE! I AM LIEUTENANT JONATHAN HAWKINS, FORMERLY OF HER MAJESTY'S ROYAL ARMY.
TELL ME, MADAM, WHAT IN GOD'S HEAVEN BRINGS YOU TO THIS DISMAL PLACE? AND WITH A CHILD NO LESS!

GOOD SIR, OUR DIRIGIBLE CRASHED, STRANDING US IN THE DESERT. WE HAVE BEEN DESPERATELY TRYING TO RETURN HOME AND WOULD GREATLY APPRECIATE ANY ASSISTANCE.
HMMM...ONE MOMENT.
THEY'LL HELP US, WON'T THEY?
I HOPE SO, BUT THEIR DEMEANOR MAKES ME WARY.
I AM AFRAID MY ASSOCIATES FEEL THAT RETURNING YOU HOME WOULD NOT BE IN OUR BEST INTERESTS.
YOU SEE, WE HAVE...FRIENDS, FRIENDS WHO WOULD PAY RATHER LARGE SUMS FOR THE CHANCE TO MEET FOREIGN WOMEN FROM THE NORTH.
YOU ARE SLAVERS.
TRADERS. PROCURERS OF VALUABLE COMMODITIES FROM FAR AWAY LANDS.
WOULD IT BE PRESUMPTUOUS TO ASSUME YOUR ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO ATTAIN AS MUCH PROFIT AS POSSIBLE FROM ANY ONE OF YOUR COMMODITIES?
A DECENT PROFIT IS UNFORTUNATELY A NECESSITY FOR EVERY BUSINESS VENTURE, I AM SURE YOU UNDERSTAND.
OH, OF COURSE. WHICH IS WHY YOU MAY BE INTERESTED TO LEARN THAT I AM LADY VIOLA BARRINGTON. SURELY YOU HAVE HEARD OF ME AND MY TWIN BROTHER SEBASTIAN, VISCOUNT DELAMERE? WE ARE RATHER FAMOUS HUNTERS.
NO, I'M AFRAID I HAVE NOT.
THEN PERHAPS YOU'VE HEARD OF MY FATHER, THE EARL OF CHADWICK.
I CAN ASSURE YOU, SIR, HE WILL REWARD YOU QUITE HANDSOMELY FOR THE SAFE RETURN OF HIS ONLY DAUGHTER AND GRANDDAUGHTER...
...MUCH MORE THAN YOUR FRIENDS WOULD BE WILLING TO PAY.
WELL, THEN. THAT IS EXCELLENT NEWS!
‹BRING THEM SOME FOOD AND WATER.›*
YOU SHALL BE OUR HONORED GUESTS!
IF YOU WOULD PLEASE RELINQUISH YOUR WEAPONS TO MY ASSOCIATES. FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY, OF COURSE.
THEN WE WILL CONTINUE ON OUR JOURNEY TO CAIRO, WHERE WE SHALL CONTACT THIS LORD FATHER OF YOURS.
OR, WE SHALL FIND OUR FRIENDS.
*TRANSLATED FROM ARABIC.
ARE WE IN TROUBLE?
THERE IS DANGER HERE, YES. BUT WE COULD ALSO USE THEIR HELP TO GET US THROUGH THE DESERT.
KEEP QUIET, GO ALONG WITH WHATEVER I SAY. WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT, WE WILL FIND A WAY TO MAKE OUR ESCAPE.

"SO! YOU LIKE TO HUNT! NOW THAT I THINK ON IT, I BELIEVE I HAVE HEARD MENTION OF A BROTHER AND SISTER HUNTING DUO FROM MY HOMELAND! HAVE YOU HUNTED BEFORE IN THE DARK CONTINENT?"
"SEBASTIAN AND I HAVE HUNTED ALL OVER THE WORLD. WE JUST CONQUERED A SNOW BEAST IN THE MOUNTAINS OF SWITZERLAND."
"A SNOW BEAST, YOU SAY? SO MUCH MORE EXCITING THAN THE COMMON LIONS AND ELEPHANTS AND RHINOCEROSES YOU WILL FIND HERE."
OH YES, WE USUALLY HUNT MORE EXOTIC GAME. BUT THIS WILL BE MY DAUGHTER'S FIRST EXPEDITION.
WE WERE ON OUR WAY TO JOIN SEBASTIAN AND MY HUSBAND ON A SAFARI IN THE SOUTH.
THEN WE MUST MAKE CERTAIN YOU ARE REUNITED WITH THEM SOON! YOUR HUSBAND, HE IS RICH TOO?
AAAAHH!
KO! KO SI!
(EH! AMIR! THIS ONE IS NO GOOD!)
WHAT ARE THEY SAYING?
HE SAYS THE GIRL HAS BEEN NOTHING BUT TROUBLE.
(BAH! JUST KILL HER AND BE DONE WITH IT.)
NO! STOP!
LIEUTENANT HAWKINS, I MUST PROTEST! SHE'S JUST A LITTLE GIRL.
LADY VIOLA, THIS IS NO PLACE FOR FEMALE SENSIBILITIES.
WE CANNOT AFFORD TO KEEP A SLAVE THAT IS MORE TROUBLE THAN IT'S WORTH.
I WILL PURCHASE HER.
YOU HAVE NO MONEY.
BUT I WILL HAVE PLENTY AS SOON AS I CONTACT MY FATHER WHEN WE REACH CAIRO.
IT WOULD BE IMPROPER FOR PERSONS OF OUR STATURE TO STAY IN THE CITY UNATTENDED WHILE WE AWAIT THE ARRIVAL OF MY FUNDS.
THIS GIRL IS CLOSE TO MY DAUGHTER'S AGE. SHE CAN SERVE AS HER ATTENDANT.
VERY WELL. BUT SHE IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY.
OF COURSE.

‹HI. MY NAME IS WINIFRED. WHAT'S YOURS?›
‹DO YOU SPEAK ARABIC?›
‹NO? MAYBE YOU UNDERSTAND A LITTLE?›
‹WOULD YOU LIKE SOMETHING TO EAT?›
‹IT'S ALL RIGHT, GO AHEAD. FOR YOU.›
SHBĀ! SHBĀ!
SHBĀ SA'HRĀ!
AY! AY! SHBĀ SA'HRĀ!
THWK
AAAHHH!
FWK!
FWC!

FRED!

BWAAA

AAAAHHH!

FRED! COME WITH ME!

SNKT

UNGGGHHH

SLSSS

SHNM

GRRGGG...

AAAHHHH!

<NO! NO!>

<MERCY!>

SNKT

GET DOWN!

"SHBÂ SA'HRÂ," WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

DESERT...

DESERT WRAITHS...

FWSH

FWSH

UNGH!

SHUNKT!!

PTAH! ERÚ ONISOWO!
WHAT DID SHE SAY?
I...I DON'T UNDERSTAND. IT'S NOT ARABIC.

CLK CLK
FRÄULEIN MECHANIKA.

Chapter Five

"All things created by Nature consist of three primal elements, namely, natural Mercury, Sulphur, and Salt in combination...It is not, however, common Mercury and common Sulphur which are the matter of the metals, but the Mercury and the Sulphur of the philosophers."

- Theophrastus Paracelsus,
Aurora Thesaurusque Philosophorum
(The Aurora of the Philosophers)

THE SAHARA DESERT
ẸRÚ ONISOWO!
WINIFRED, COULD YOU ASK IF ANY OF THEM UNDERSTAND ARABIC? TELL THEM WE --

AKINA?
EYA!
NIBE NI O WÁ NI! A WÁ FUN Ó.
MA BINU, ARÁBÌNRÍN NLA.
NWỌN SÌ LỌ LÁTI PA MI. ÒBÌNRÍN NÁ DÚRÓ WỌN.
OUR LITTLE SISTER, EYA, SHE SAY YOU HELP HER. Ó ṢEUN. T'ANK YOU.
YOU SPEAK ENGLISH?

I SPEAK ALL T'E SLAVER TONGUES.
WE ARE NOT SLAVERS. THEY TOOK US CAPTIVE, AFTER OUR AIRSHIP CRASHED AND STRANDED US IN THE DESERT.
AH, YOU COME IN T'E FLYING SHIPS. T'IS IS NOT WISE, TO FLY IN T'E DESERT WINDS.
BUT WE SEE MANY OF T'E FLYING SHIPS T'E PAST FEW MOONS, WHEN BEFORE WE SEE NONE.
PAPPY!
PAPPY?
HER GRANDFATHER. HE LEFT FOR AFRICA THREE MONTHS AGO AND VANISHED. WE CAME HERE TO FIND HIM AND BRING HIM HOME.
A FLYING SHIP PASS OVER OUR VILLAGE, T'REE MOONS PAST. T'E SHIP, IT TRAVEL ALONE. BUT MORE SHIPS COME, ONE OR TWO MOONS AFTER.
DID IT HAVE A *W* ON THE STERN, PAINTED IN BLUE? HE NAMED THE SHIP *WINIFRED*, FOR ME.
T'E FIRST SHIP. YES. IT HAVE T'IS.

DO YOU KNOW WHERE IT WENT? COULD YOU SHOW US?
ALL T'E FLYING SHIPS, T'EY GO INTO T'E JUNGLE, FOLLOWING T'E GREAT RIVER, BEYOND OUR VILLAGE.
MY SISTERS AND I, WE FOLLOW TO SEE T'EY CAUSE NO TROUBLE IN OUR LANDS.
AKINA, I AM CALLED, FIRST DAUGHTER OF T'E DESERT WRAITHS.
YOU, YOU HELP OUR LITTLE SISTER, EYA. A DEBT IS OWED.
I WILL HELP YOU.
I WILL SHOW YOU TO T'E FLYING SHIPS, TO T'IS SHIP WIT' T'E BLUE MARK.
WE JOURNEY FIRST TO OUR VILLAGE, TO TAKE T'E SISTERS WHO WOULD JOIN US TO OUR QUEEN.

WHAT ABOUT THE MEN?
T'E MEN WHO ARE NO LONGER MEN MAY JOIN US IF T'EY WISH. NO OTHERS.
THEY WILL DIE HERE IN THE DESERT.
T'EN T'EY WILL DIE.
COME. TO CROSS T'E DESERT WE GO ON OUR SHIP.
T'IS, T'IS IS A SHIP FOR T'E DESERT WINDS!
IT SEEMS OUR FORTUNES HAVE TURNED, THANKS TO LITTLE EYA.
GO GET SOME REST, WINIFRED.
WE ARE SAFE HERE AMONG THE SISTERS.

MEANWHILE...
"THE SECRET LIES WITHIN." THERE MUST BE THE HIDDEN DOOR HERE SOMEWHERE...
MR. STRASSMANN, LOOK AT THIS. A DIAGRAM OF THE PLANETS ORBITING THE SUN.
PERHAPS THAT IS ALL THAT WAS MEANT BY THE "SECRETS OF THE UNIVERSE"? A TRIVIALITY NOW BUT A GREAT REVELATION TO PEOPLE WHO BELIEVED THE EARTH WAS FLAT, AND THE CENTER OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM.
NO... THIS, THIS IS NOT THE DRAWING OF THE PLANETS. THIS LOOKS LIKE...AS ABOVE, SO BELOW!
MR. STRASSMANN?
AN ANCIENT ALCHEMY THEOREM: THAT WHICH IS BELOW IS LIKE THAT WHICH IS ABOVE.
AS THE PLANETS ORBIT THE SUN, SO DO THE MERCURIES -- ALCHEMICAL MERCURY, THE FEMALE COMPONENT OF MATTER -- ORBIT THE SULPHUR, THE MALE COMPONENT.
BUT SOME ALCHEMISTS SAY MATTER ALSO INCLUDES THE NEUTER COMPONENT, ALCHEMICAL SALT. SEE HERE, HOW IT SHOWS THE "SUN" SPLIT INTO TWO SMALLER "SUNS," EACH ORBITED BY LESS "PLANETS."
ATTACKING THE ALCHEMICAL SULPHUR WITH A LONE SALT COMPONENT SPLITS THE SULPHUR. THUS AN ELEMENT WITH MORE SULPHUR IS TRANSMUTED INTO AN ELEMENT WITH LESS SULPHUR!
I AM AFRAID I DO NOT FOLLOW, MR. STRASSMANN.
IT IS ACTUALLY QUITE SIMPLE, VERY ELEGANT!
BUT SEE THESE RAYS? TO TRANSMUTE THE ELEMENT ALSO RELEASES THE ENERGY. POSSIBLY A DANGEROUS AMOUNT OF ENERGY, WHICH MAY BE WHY THE ANCIENTS HID THE SECRET.
HERR STRASSMANN.
YOU SAID THERE IS SOMETHING HIDDEN INSIDE THE STONE STRUCTURE.

YES, SO THE WRITINGS SAY. I AM SEARCHING FOR THE...WHAT, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
YOU HAVE COPIED ALL OF THE TEXT, YES?
<FORCE IT OPEN.>*
*TRANSLATED FROM GERMAN.
KLNK KLANK
KLNK
KLNK KLANK KLNK
KLNK KLNK KLANK
THAT IS A PRICELESS ARTIFACT!
NOTHING BUT STONE, PROFESSOR. WORTHLESS.
THESE, ON THE OTHER HAND, ARE OF UNIMAGINABLE VALUE.

WHAT... WHAT IS THAT? THEY LOOK LIKE... LIKE...
LIKE WEAPONS.

THE KONGO JUNGLE, A FEW DAYS LATER
WE HIDE OUR VILLAGE HERE, IN T'E JUNGLE, WHERE WE HAVE T'E FOOD AND T'E WATER.
AND YOU HAVE NO MEN AMONGST YOU?
MEN HAVE NO HONOR.

MANY YEARS AGO, A KING, A GOOD KING FOR A GREAT KINGDOM. HE NEED WARRIORS TO PROTECT HIM AND HIS, WARRIORS WIT' HONOR WHO WOULD NEVER BE FALSE.
HE CHOOSE ALL WOMEN. AS LITTLE GIRLS LIKE EYA, WE LEARN. T'E WAYS TO FIGHT, T'E WAYS TO KILL.
WE ARE T'E MOST FAST, T'E MOST FIERCE WARRIORS. ALL PEOPLES FEAR AND RESPECT US.
BUT T'EN T'E GOOD KING, HE DIE, AND T'E NEW KING IS NOT GOOD. HE MAKE T'E SLAVES OF HIS PEOPLE. HE KILL AND MAIM FOR NO PURPOSE BUT HIS PLEASURES.
HE TAKE UJAMA HER EYE AND LAUGH.
SO T'E SISTERS, WE KILL T'E NOT GOOD KING.
BUT TO KILL T'E KING, WE ARE FALSE TO OUR OATHS AND CURSED, SO WE MUST LEAVE T'E KINGDOM.
T'E SISTERS, WE MAKE A NEW HOME HERE, AND MAKE NEW OATHS, TO FIGHT T'E NOT GOOD MEN, AND FREE T'OSE TAKEN FOR T'E SLAVES.

KRAAWW KRAAWW KRAAWW KRAAWW
KRAAWW KRAAWW
EEK EEK
HOO HOO HOO
EEK EEK
HOO HOO
WHAT IS HAPPENING? IS THIS BEHAVIOR NORMAL?
NO, NOT NORMAL. T'E ANIMALS, T'EY KNOW WHEN T'E AIR IS NOT RIGHT.
WHAT THE...?
KLK
SOMETHING LARGE IS HEADING OUR WAY!
THRSH THRSH
THRSH TH

HNNNRRRAAAH
AGBANRERE!
LO KURO! GET BACK!
BA-THUM BA-THUM
BA-THUM BA-THUM
T'E RHINOCEROS, IT IS T'E GENTLE CREATURE. T'IS, T'IS IS NOT RIGHT.
HNNRRAHH
AAAHHH!
SHNK!
HNNRRR
AAAAHHH!
UNGH!
AKINA!
HNRAAAH
RUN, FRED!
STAY HERE!

AGBANRERE! DURO!

WE ARE NOT YOUR ENEMY!

HNNRR

AAAAHHH!

OOOMPH!

THOOMP

HNRAAAAAH

AKINA! GET THE OTHERS TO SAFETY!

HNNRR

I WILL... UNGH...HOLD HIM...BACK!

WHOA!

HRRNRR

LADY MECHANIKA!

THRSH
UMMMPH!
GUTEN TAG, LITTLE FRÄULEIN!
THRSH THRSH THRSH
WHOMP!!
ESU...
THERE'S A GOOD FELLOW. PERHAPS A BIT OF A NAP WILL IMPROVE YOUR DISPOSITION.
EGÚN BÚBURU!
HOW...
HRRUUNNGHHHH...
YOUR ARM!
IT IS JUST A PROSTHESIS, A METAL ARM. MY REAL LIMBS WERE... AMPUTATED. REMOVED.
IT IS LIKE T'E WOOD LEG, YES? BUT T'E METAL, IT MAKE YOU MORE STRONG?
YES, AND MY...WHERE'S WINIFRED?
FRED!
SHE'S NOT HERE!

T'IS BE WHERE SHE STAND LAST?
YES.
T'ERE BE TRACKS MOVING T'IS WAY.
FRED WOULD NOT RUN AWAY.
NO. T'E TRACKS, T'EY ARE MADE BY ONE MORE BIG T'AN FRED.
SOMEONE TOOK HER.
FRED!
WHAT IS T'IS?
DO YOUR PEOPLE MAKE ALSO T'E METAL BIRDS?
NOT MY PEOPLE, NO. BAD PEOPLE.
THE SAME BAD PEOPLE THAT SHOT DOWN OUR AIRSHIP.
HURRY! T'IS WAY!
T'E TRACKS, T'EY STOP HERE. BUT T'ERE IS NO PLACE TO GO.
THERE IS. THEY COULD GO...
...UP.
FRED...

"T'EY HAVE GONE, BUT WE CAN FIND T'EM."
WE WILL BUILD AN ARMY A HUNDRED STRONG, AND GO TO T'E PLACE OF T'E FLYING SHIPS TO TAKE BACK OUR LITTLE SISTER FRED!
YOU SEE? T'E MOST FIERCE WARRIORS OF ALL T'E KONGO!
T'E OBABIRIN, T'E QUEEN OLORISA, SHE IS HERE. WE MUST FIRST ASK FOR T'E PERMISSION.
BOW YOUR HEAD TO T'E GROUND, TO SHOW T'E RESPECT FOR T'E QUEEN.

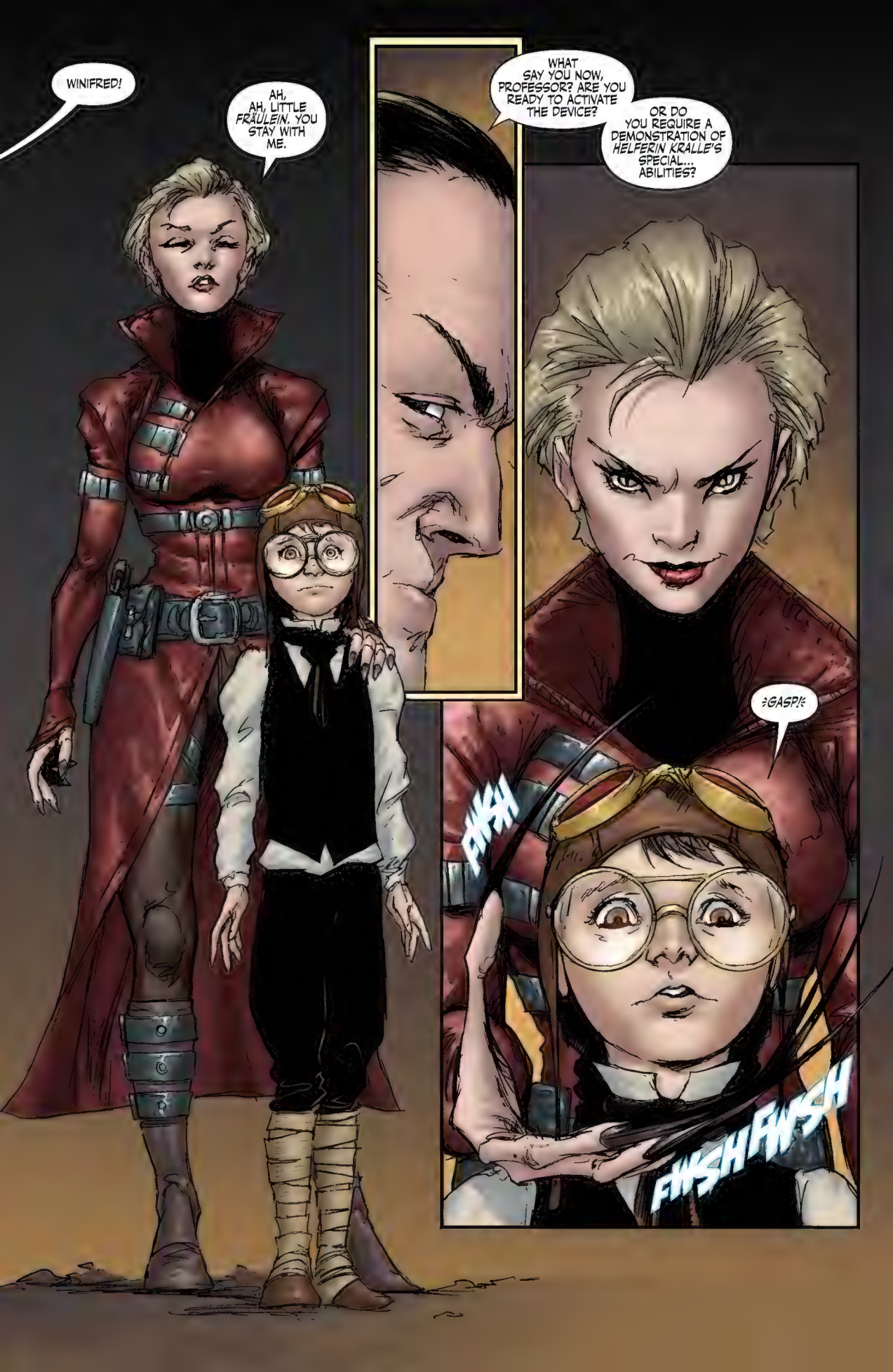
OBABIRIN!
T'IS WOMAN SAVE OUR LITTLE SISTER EYA FROM T'E SLAVERS, BUT HER NEAR-DAUGHTER IS STOLEN WHILE UNDER OUR PROTECTION.
I CALL HER SISTER, FOR SHE IS A BRAVE AND STRONG WARRIOR AND I OWE HER BLOOD-DEBT. I ASK PERMISSION TO TAKE AN ARMY AGAINST T'ESE TRESPASSERS WHO DARE TO ENTER OUR LANDS AND STEAL OUR CHILDREN.
YOU HAVE OUR T'ANKS, SISTER. WE WILL HONOR T'IS BLOOD-DEBT. YOUR ENEMIES ARE OUR ENEMIES.
YOU MAY APPROACH, AND RECEIVE OUR BLESSINGS.

YO AWON GILAASI KI O SI SUNMO AWON AYABA.
O SEUN OBABIRIN.
YOU MAY RISE AND APPROACH T'E QUEEN, BUT FIRST YOU MUST REMOVE YOUR EYE-COVERINGS.
O SEUN OBABIRIN. THANK YOU.
I AM EXTREMELY GRATEFUL FOR ANY ASSISTANCE YOU MAY --
ESU! ESU EGÚN!
DEMON? YOUR EYES!
T'IS ONE IS DEMON-CURSED! SHE WILL BRING MISFORTUNE UPON US ALL!
THEY ARE PART OF MY MECHANICS. I AM NO DEMON, I SWEAR. I AM --

NO, OBABIRIN! SHE IS JUST A WOMAN, WIT' T'E METAL ARMS AND LEGS T'AT MAKE HER STRONG. T'EY HELP HER TO STOP A RHINOCEROS WIT' NO HELP AND NO WEAPONS.
NO. T'IS, T'E RED EYES, I HAVE SEEN T'IS BEFORE. SHE IS DEMON-CURSED AND MUST LEAVE! NOW!
FOR YOUR BLOOD-DEBT, WE WILL NOT SLAY HER, BUT SHE CANNOT STAY AMONG US. TAKE HER AWAY BEFORE SHE BRINGS HER CURSE DOWN UPON US ALL!
LATER THAT NIGHT, MANY MILES OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE.
THRSH
THRSH
THRSH
YOU ARE GOING IN T'E WRONG DIRECTION.
AKINA!
WE MUST GO SOUTH AND FOLLOW T'E RIVER, IF WE ARE TO FIND T'E FLYING SHIPS.

THE OBABIRIN, YOU CONVINCED HER TO GIVE PERMISSION?
NO. SHE SAY YOU ARE DEMON-CURSED, AND WILL NOT RISK HER PEOPLE.
BUT I, I AM NOT AFRAID OF YOUR CURSES.
COME, LET US GO AND RESCUE OUR LITTLE SISTER!

MEANWHILE...
WELL, PROFESSOR? HAVE YOU DETERMINED HOW TO ACTIVATE THE DEVICE?
I CANNOT. ACCORDING TO MR. STRASSMANN'S CALCULATIONS, THESE ARTIFACTS ARE CAPABLE OF UNIMAGINABLE DESTRUCTION. WE MUST NOT OPEN THIS PANDORA'S BOX!
YOU WILL TRANSLATE THE REST OF THE TABLET, PROFESSOR.
I WILL NOT.
DO WHAT YOU WILL TO ME. I WILL NOT CONTRIBUTE TO THE DOWNFALL OF MANKIND.
PERHAPS YOU FEEL SAFE, PROFESSOR, KNOWING YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON WHO CAN TRANSLATE THIS ANCIENT LANGUAGE.
AND YOU WOULD BE CORRECT. BUT YOU FORGET, IT IS NOT YOUR LIFE AND WELL-BEING THAT IS AT STAKE.
HELFERIN KRALLE!
PAPPY?


WINIFRED!
AH, AH, LITTLE *FRÄULEIN*. YOU STAY WITH ME.
WHAT SAY YOU NOW, PROFESSOR? ARE YOU READY TO ACTIVATE THE DEVICE?
OR DO YOU REQUIRE A DEMONSTRATION OF *HELFERIN KRALLE'S* SPECIAL... ABILITIES?
:GASP!:
FWSH
FWSH FWSH

Chapter Six

"An incandescent column of smoke and flame, as brilliant as ten thousand suns, rose in all its splendor... It was the unknown weapon, the Iron Thunderbolt, a gigantic messenger of death which reduced to ashes the entire race of the Vrishnis and Andhakas."

-Mahabharata, Book XVI, Section 1
(circa 400 BCE)

AFRICA.
KLK
WE HAVE FINISHED ASSEMBLING THE DEVICE, MR. DIREKTOR. NOW WILL YOU RELEASE US?
ARE YOU CERTAIN YOU HAVE ASSEMBLED IT CORRECTLY, PROFESSOR? YOU WOULD NOT ATTEMPT TO DECEIVE ME NOW, WOULD YOU?
THEN I SHALL RELEASE MISS WINIFRED, AS PROMISED. BUT FIRST...
NO, NO... WE FOLLOWED THE INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE TABLET PRECISELY.
MR. STRASSMANN FOUND ALL OF THE DESCRIBED INGREDIENTS IN THE PRECEDING CHAMBER AND POURED THEM INTO THEIR DESIGNATED COMPARTMENTS. ALL THAT REMAINS IS SETTING THE TIMING MECHANISM.
WE HAVE DONE EVERYTHING YOU ASKED.

...WE MUST CONFIRM THAT THE DEVICE FUNCTIONS PROPERLY.
HELFERIN!
YES, DIREKTOR! SHALL I TEST IT IN THE DESERT?
HMMM. I SHOULD NOT WANT TO WASTE IT, IN THE EVENT WE ARE UNABLE TO DUPLICATE THE DESIGN. THERE ARE ONLY THREE MORE REMAINING.
TEST IT ON BERLIN.
BERLIN?!
HUNDREDS, MAYBE THOUSANDS OF INNOCENT PEOPLE WOULD BE KILLED! HOW COULD YOU DO THAT TO YOUR OWN COUNTRYMEN?
WHO EVER SAID THEY WERE MY COUNTRYMEN?

THE KONGO RIVER.
BUT T'EY WOULD NOT DARE TO DISTURB US.
NO MAN OF T'E KONGO WOULD DARE TO DISTURB TWO WARRIOR-SISTERS OF T'E OMOBINRIN.
YOUR QUEEN SAID SHE HAS SEEN SOMEONE LIKE ME. SOMEONE WITH RED EYES?
YES, T'E QUEEN SHE SAY T'IS. DEMON-CURSED, SHE CALL IT.
HAVE YOU SEEN THIS TOO?
NO, NOT I. BUT T'ERE BE MANY STRANGE CREATURES IN T'E DEPTHS OF T'E JUNGLES.
I SUPPOSE WE ARE LUCKY WE HAVE NOT ENCOUNTERED ANY ON THIS JOURNEY. WE HAVE NOT EVEN SEEN ANOTHER HUMAN BEING SINCE LEAVING YOUR VILLAGE.
WE ARE FAR DOWN T'E RIVER KONGO. NO MAN LIVES HERE. T'ERE BE OTHERS BEFORE, WHERE T'E RIVER WAS MORE SLOW. MANY DANGEROUS TRIBES.

MANY HOURS LATER...
"T'ERE. T'ERE BE T'E FLYING SHIPS. IN T'E SAME PLACE AS WHEN FIRST WE FOLLOW T'EM."
"THANK YOU, AKINA. I NEVER WOULD HAVE FOUND THEM WITHOUT YOUR HELP."
IT IS NOTHING. NOW LET US GO AND FREE OUR LITTLE SISTER.
WAIT. SOMEONE IS COMING.
BE CAREFUL WITH THAT! WE CANNOT RISK IT EXPLODING BEFORE IT IS IN PLACE!

LOAD THE DEVICE ABOARD THE PROFESSOR'S SHIP.
IF THERE IS A PROBLEM, OR IF THERE ISN'T, IT WILL BE BLAMED ON THE BRITISH.
WHAT ABOUT US?
YOU WILL BE COMING WITH US.
BUT YOU PROMISED TO LET US GO IF WE ASSEMBLED THE DEVICE!
AND I WILL. AFTER WE ENSURE THAT YOU HAVE FULFILLED YOUR PART OF THE BARGAIN.
SECURE THEM ON BOARD.
YES, DIREKTOR.
I COUNT TWELVE SOLDIERS, PLUS THE WOMAN.
ONLY TWELVE AND ONE?
WE CAN TAKE T'EM.

OH BLOODY HELL! THE SHIP IS DEPARTING! HURRY!
JUMP!
AKINA!
UNGH!
SWOOSH
KLUNK

=UNGH=
HOW ARE YOU WITH A GUN, AKINA?
I AM A SISTER OF T'E O'MOBINRIN. WE ARE TRAINED TO USE ALL WEAPONS. HOW DO YOU FARE WITH A BLADE?
I ALWAYS CARRY A KNIFE IN MY BOOT.
T'IS IS GOOD. T'E BLADE IS MORE QUIET AND MORE FAST T'AN T'E GUN.
FASTER THAN A GUN?
YES. IN T'E HANDS OF A SKILLED WARRIOR IT CAN KILL BEFORE ONE CAN SHOOT.
THEY'RE IN HERE!
TWO GUARDS.
"MY BLADES WILL TAKE T'EM.
SHNK
SHNK
"NOW T'ERE ARE ONLY TEN AND ONE."

PROFESSOR THOMSEN!
DON'T WORRY! WE WILL GET YOU OUT OF HERE!
LADY MECHANIKA?
THEY HAVE WINIFRED!
SHIK!
I KNOW. SHE WAS WITH ME WHEN THEY CAPTURED HER. DO YOU KNOW WHERE SHE IS NOW?
THEY SEPARATED US. I THINK THE WOMAN HAS HER. KRALLE.
ÈṢU!
T'E GUARDS!
WHAT'S WRONG?
WHAT THE--?
MEIN GOTT!
WHAT KIND OF CREATURE IS THIS?
ALANGBA ỌMỌ...T'E CHILDREN OF T'E SERPENT.
YOU'VE ENCOUNTERED THESE CREATURES BEFORE?
NO. BUT T'ERE BE STORIES TOLD AMONG MY PEOPLE.
OLD STORIES OF T'E ALANGBA ỌMỌ WHO ARE HALF MAN AND HALF SERPENT, WHO CAN CHANGE T'ERE SKIN TO HIDE AMONGST US.
YOU WOULD BE MR. STRASSMANN.
I...I...
THESE CREATURES CAME FROM YOUR UNIVERSITY, FOLLOWING YOUR REPORTS.
KLCK

HE ISN'T ONE OF THEM! HE WAS A PRISONER TOO, JUST LIKE ME.
HOW CAN YOU BE CERTAIN?
I KNOW.
GIVE ME YOUR HAND.
WHAT? NO, I --
T'E SERPENT MEN, T'EY BLEED GREEN.
UNGH...
HE IS HUMAN.
MY APOLOGIES, MR. STRASSMANN.
THEY ARE NOT NEEDED.
LADY MECHANIKA, THESE PEOPLE, THESE CREATURES, THEY MUST BE STOPPED. THEY THREATENED TO KILL WINIFRED IF WE DID NOT ASSEMBLE THE DEVICE.
DEVICE? WHAT DEVICE?
AN ANCIENT WEAPON WE FOUND AT THE SITE, A WEAPON CAPABLE OF MASSIVE DESTRUCTION!
THEY PLAN ON USING IT AGAINST BERLIN. I BELIEVE IT COULD DESTROY THE CITY ENTIRE.
WE WILL STOP THEM. AND WE'LL SAVE WINIFRED.

Variant Cover by
Joe Benitez & Sabine Rich

SO, MR. JABIR WAS CORRECT.
THE PROFESSOR HAS INDEED UNCOVERED SOME KIND OF ANCIENT WEAPON.
I WONDER IF HE WAS AWARE OF THESE LIZARD MEN AS WELL. HE SEEMED TO KNOW SO MUCH MORE THAN HE REVEALED.
THIS WAY.
AND OF COURSE I CANNOT FORGET, HE WARNED THAT THESE MEN MUST BE STOPPED.
"WHATEVER THE COST."
I UNDERSTOOD THEN WHAT HE WAS IMPLYING, THOUGH I DID NOT BELIEVE I WOULD EVER HAVE TO MAKE SUCH A CHOICE.
PERHAPS HUNDREDS OF INNOCENTS WILL DIE IF I FAIL TO RETRIEVE THIS MYSTERIOUS WEAPON.

WINIFRED WILL CERTAINLY PERISH IF I FAIL TO RESCUE HER.
YOU MUST BE THE MECHANICAL WOMAN WHO HAS BEEN CAUSING SO MUCH TROUBLE.
I WOULD ADVISE YOU TO DROP YOUR WEAPONS. NOW.
THERE WAS NEVER ANY CHOICE.
I CANNOT REPEAT THE MISTAKES FROM MY PAST.
I WILL SAVE WINIFRED, WHATEVER THE COST.
THUNK
KLNK
LET HER GO. SHE'S AN INNOCENT CHILD.
AAAAHHH!
NONE OF YOUR KIND IS INNOCENT.
LEAVE HER ALONE!

YOU DO NOT GIVE THE ORDERS HERE, FRÄULEIN MECHANIKA!
WE ARE OF THE OLD RACE. THIS LAND WAS OURS LONG BEFORE YOU USURPERS ARRIVED.
BUT WE SHALL BE TAKING OUR RIGHTFUL PLACE SOON. AFTER WE HAVE ERADICATED YOUR... CORRUPTION.
KILL HER, AND HER COMPANION.
BUT DO NOT HARM THE PROFESSOR OR MR. STRASSMANN! WE MAY STILL REQUIRE THEIR SERVICES.
HHHRRAAAH
HSSSS
HHSSSS
HHRRAHH
HSSSS
HYAH!
AAAAAAHHH!
THWAK
FRED! GET DOWN!
WOOOSHH
AAARRGGGHHHH...
SHUNK

PROFESSOR! GET FRED TO SAFETY! AKINA AND I WILL DEAL WITH THIS RABBLE.

IS THAT SO, FRÄULEIN? YOU CANNOT --

YES. WE CAN.

POW

GRRGGG...

T'IS IS NOTHING! T'ERE BE ONLY... UNG!

EIGHT OF T'EM!

SINK

HISS

GO, PROFESSOR! PROTECT OUR LITTLE SISTER!

HHISS

HHRAHH

UNGH... SEVEN!

SHUNK

THWAK

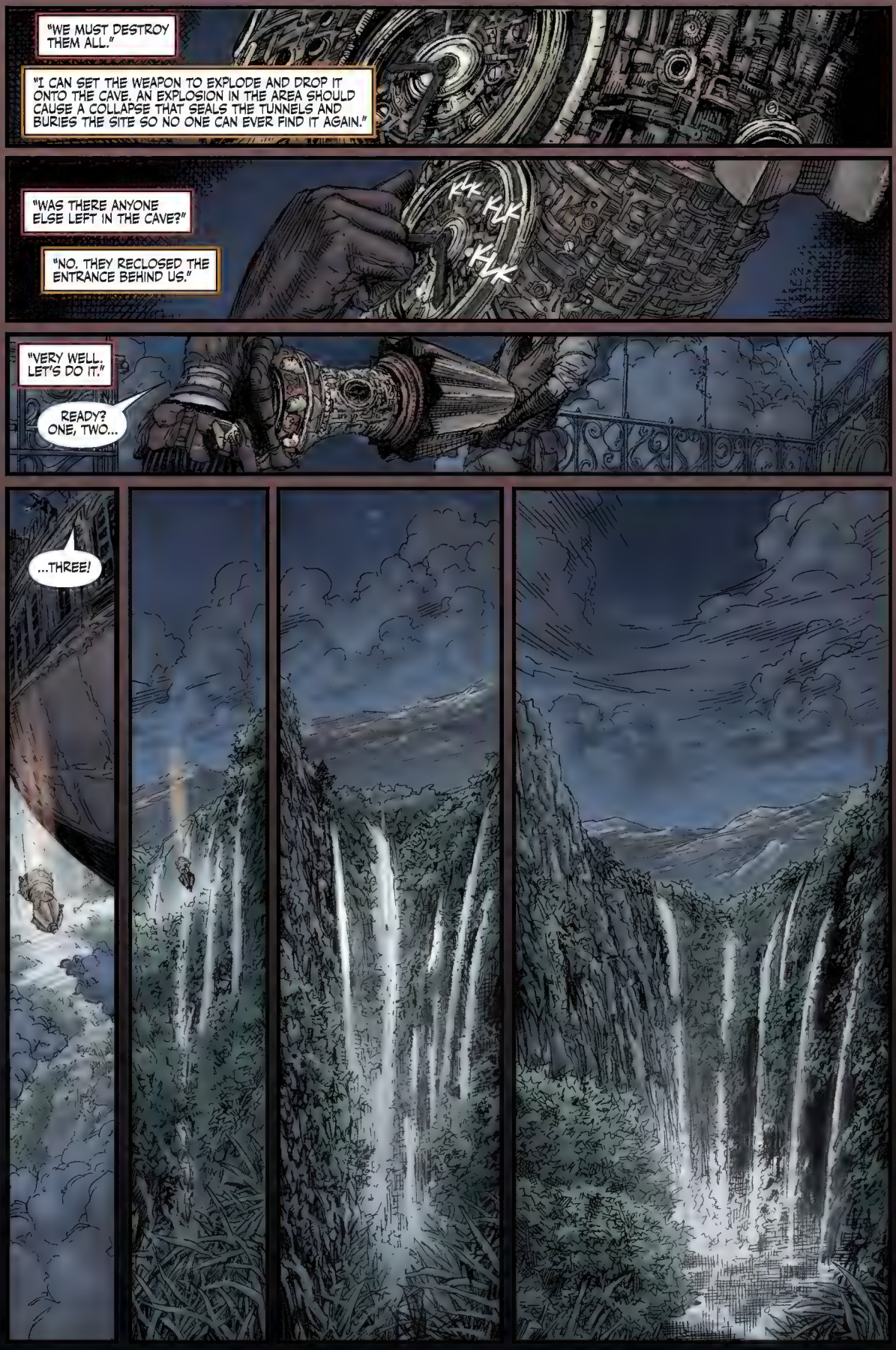
UGH...

ARGHH...

WINIFRED!
PAPPY!
SIX... AND NOW FIVE!
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? DID THEY HURT YOU?
I'M FINE, PAPPY. I KNEW LADY MECH--
GRRRRR...
AAAAHHHH!
DRECKSKERL!
BLAM
THAT IS FOR MY HOMELAND.
WE MUST TURN THE SHIP AROUND.
WHOOSH

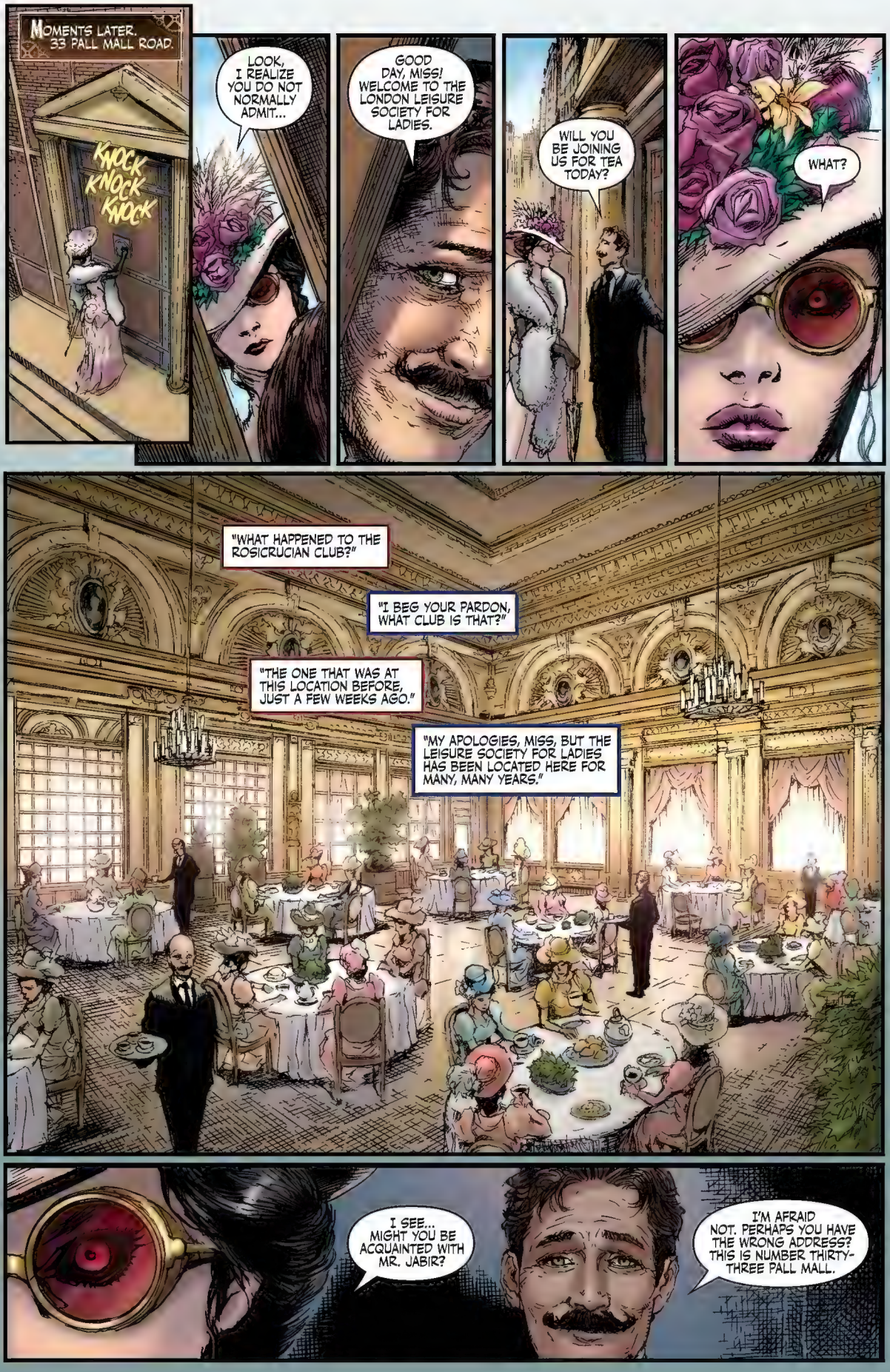
UNGH... FOUR!
AAAGG
UNGH
THWAK
OOOMPH!
SHNK
UNGH...
EVEN WITH YOUR ENHANCEMENTS, MECHANIKA, YOU ARE NOT STRONGER THAN ME!
HYAH!
MAYBE NOT, BUT I AM SMARTER.
AAAAAHHHH!
THAT'S WHAT THEY ALWAYS SAY, IN THE END.
THIS IS NOT THE END, MECHANIKA!
IT IS ONLY THE BEGINNING...
HRRAAA!

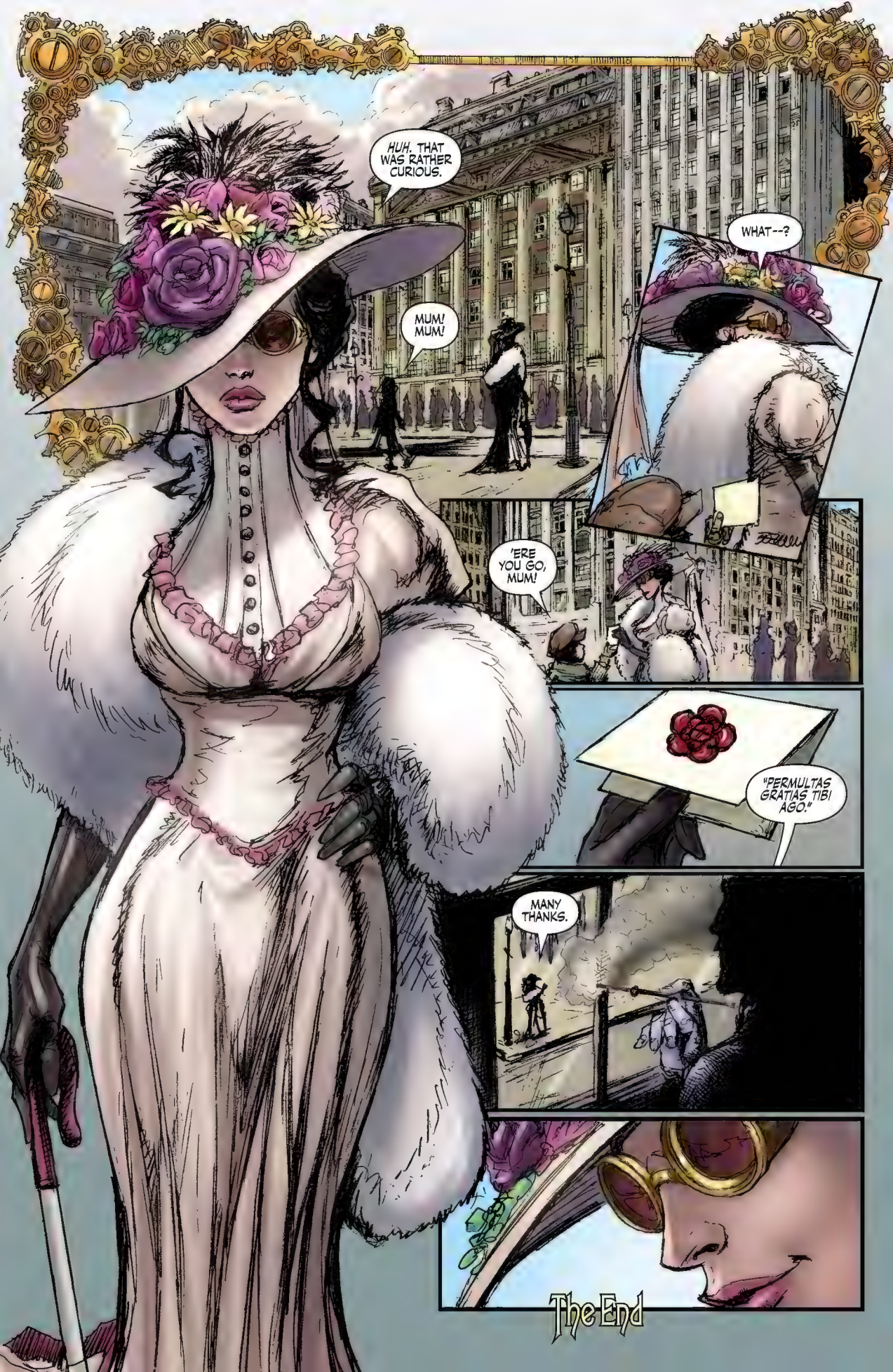
THWOK
UNNGGHH...
WHAM
UGH...
SHNKT
ONE AND...
WHERE ARE THE REST OF THE LIZARD MEN?
DEAD.
HOW IS EVERYONE?
WE ARE ALL UNHARMED.
WE'RE FINE.
GOOD JOB, WINIFRED!
PROFESSOR, WHERE IS THE WEAPON? WE MUST DESTROY IT IF THERE IS ANY CHANCE, AS THEY SEEMED TO BELIEVE, THAT IT COULD BE USED TO ANNIHILATE THE ENTIRE HUMAN RACE.
IT'S ONBOARD, ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SHIP. BUT THERE WERE MORE IN THE CAVE.
MORE WEAPONS?
YES.
AS WELL AS MY TRANSLATION OF THE TABLET AND OUR NOTES. THEY COULD POTENTIALLY BE USED TO BUILD MORE OF THE DEVICES.


"WE MUST DESTROY THEM ALL."
"I CAN SET THE WEAPON TO EXPLODE AND DROP IT ONTO THE CAVE. AN EXPLOSION IN THE AREA SHOULD CAUSE A COLLAPSE THAT SEALS THE TUNNELS AND BURIES THE SITE SO NO ONE CAN EVER FIND IT AGAIN."
"WAS THERE ANYONE ELSE LEFT IN THE CAVE?"
"NO. THEY RECLOSED THE ENTRANCE BEHIND US."
KLK
KLK
KLK
"VERY WELL. LET'S DO IT."
READY? ONE, TWO...
...THREE!

WHOA!
WATCH OUT!
OOOMPH!
HOLD ON TO ME, FRED!
UNGH!
MOTHER OF GOD...
WHERE... WHERE IS IT? CAN YOU SEE ANYTHING?
IT'S GONE. THE ENTIRE MOUNTAIN.
OBLITERATED.

EPILOGUE. LONDON, SEVERAL DAYS LATER.
WILL HE BE SAFE FROM THE LIZARD MEN ACROSS THE ATLANTIC?
I BELIEVE SO. HE IS CHANGING HIS NAME AND HEADING TO SOME OBSCURE NEW UNIVERSITY IN CALIFORNIA THAT NO ONE HAS EVER HEARD OF.
BESIDES, THEY HAVE NO REASON TO LOOK FOR HIM. WE MAY HAVE ASSEMBLED THE DEVICE BUT WE DO NOT KNOW HOW TO BUILD ONE.
THAT KNOWLEDGE IS LOST FOREVER.
DO YOU THINK WE'LL SEE MR. STRASSMANN OR AKINA AGAIN? MAYBE WE CAN WRITE TO THEM?
I AM AFRAID THAT IS UNLIKELY, WINIFRED.
MR. STRASSMANN WILL BE SAFER IF WE REFRAIN FROM CONTACTING HIM. AND AKINA HAS RETURNED TO HER HOME, WHERE THEY DO NOT COMMUNICATE WITH OUTSIDERS.
SHALL WE BE HEADING HOME AS WELL? I FOR ONE AM EAGER TO GET BACK!
I WILL MEET YOU AT THE TRAIN STATION, PROFESSOR. THERE IS ONE MORE STOP I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE FIRST.


MOMENTS LATER.
33 PALL MALL ROAD.
KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK
LOOK, I REALIZE YOU DO NOT NORMALLY ADMIT...
GOOD DAY, MISS! WELCOME TO THE LONDON LEISURE SOCIETY FOR LADIES.
WILL YOU BE JOINING US FOR TEA TODAY?
WHAT?
"WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ROSICRUCIAN CLUB?"
"I BEG YOUR PARDON, WHAT CLUB IS THAT?"
"THE ONE THAT WAS AT THIS LOCATION BEFORE, JUST A FEW WEEKS AGO."
"MY APOLOGIES, MISS, BUT THE LEISURE SOCIETY FOR LADIES HAS BEEN LOCATED HERE FOR MANY, MANY YEARS."
I SEE... MIGHT YOU BE ACQUAINTED WITH MR. JABIR?
I'M AFRAID NOT. PERHAPS YOU HAVE THE WRONG ADDRESS? THIS IS NUMBER THIRTY-THREE PALL MALL.


HUH. THAT WAS RATHER CURIOUS.
MUM! MUM!
WHAT--?
'ERE YOU GO, MUM!
"PERMULTAS GRATIAS TIBI AGO."
MANY THANKS.
The End

Cover Gallery

Día de los Muertos Cover by Joe Benitez & Peter Steigerwald

Variant Cover by Joe Benitez & Sabine Rich

In the Drawing Room

JOE BENITEZ is an American comic book artist who has worked on hit titles such as *Titans*, *JLA*, *Superman/Batman*, and *Supergirl* for DC Comics; *Weapon Zero* and *The Darkness* for Image Comics; and *Soulfire* for Aspen Comics. In 2015, Joe finally fulfilled a lifelong dream and launched his own publishing company, Benitez Productions, where he continues to publish his creator-owned books: the steampunk series *Lady Mechanika* and the urban fantasy *Wraithborn*.

Right: initial layouts by Joe.

Left: final pencils by Joe & Martin.

Below: final colors by Mike.

MARTIN MONTIEL is a Mexican comic book artist who hails from Tijuana, BC. His first foray into the American comic book industry was on another steampunk book, *The Victorian*, by Penny-Farthing Press in 2001, followed by several other indie books, including a creator-owned book, the epic sci-fi adventure *Zendra*. He met Joe through Image Comics, where they worked together on books such as *Magdalena/Vampirella* and *Nottingham*. Martin then completed a year-long run on Joe's former book, *The Darkness*.

MIKE GARCIA, known by some as The Big Peanutt, is a weird breed of colorist. Although he's never strayed completely away from the world of comics since his start in '96, he's only kept his palette dipped in the waters of a few select projects over the past few years. His day-to-day work has mainly consisted of toy designing everything under the sun, ranging from concept art to board games, and from toy products to their packaging. Lately, he's been moonlighting as a colorist on *Lady Mechanika*.

BENITEZ PRODUCTIONS, INC. · **Joe Benitez**: Creative Director / Chief Executive Officer · **Marcia Chen**: Editor-in-Chief / Chief Financial Officer · **Michael Heisler**: Production Director · **Stephanie Reyes**: Office Assistant · **Andria Richard**: Production Assistant · **BENITEZPRODUCTIONS.COM**

IMAGE COMICS, INC. · **Robert Kirkman**: Chief Operations Officer · **Erik Larsen**: Chief Financial Officer · **Todd McFarlane**: President · **Marc Silvestri**: Chief Executive Officer · **Jim Valentino**: Vice President · **Eric Stephenson**: Publisher & Chief Creative Officer · **IMAGECOMICS.COM**

JOE BENITEZ'S

Lady Mechanika

"The Tablet of Destinies holds the secrets of the Universe... he who possesses [it] shall rule the world."
– Sumerian Legend

After a young friend shows up unexpectedly on her doorstep, Lady Mechanika immediately drops everything to come to her aid. They embark on a globe-spanning trek filled with ancient artifacts, secret societies, and scientific curiosities, but Lady Mechanika is eventually confronted with an impossible decision: the life of her friend, or the fate of all humankind.

Set in a fictionalized steampunk Victorian England, a time when magic and superstition clashed with new scientific discoveries and inventions, LADY MECHANIKA chronicles a young woman's obsessive search for her identity after a mad scientist's horrific experiments left her with mechanical limbs and no memory of her past.

This volume collects the entire second Lady Mechanika story, *The Tablet of Destinies*, along with a gorgeous cover art gallery.

BENITEZ PRODUCTIONS

ISBN: 978-1-5343-3346-8

RATED T / TEEN • STEAMPUNK ADVENTURE

image

IMAGECOMICS.COM
BENITEZPRODUCTIONS.COM